1880

uncertain spring. The weather, perpetually changing,
ds of blue and of purple flying over the land. In the
farmers, looking at the fields, were apprehensive; in
mbrellas were opened and then shut by people looking
sky. But in April such weather was to be expected.
ls of shop assistants made that remark, as they handed
cels to ladies in flounced dresses standing on the other
he counter at Whiteley's and the Army and Navy
terminable processions of shoppers in the West End, of
men in the East, paraded the pavements, like caravans
lly marching, – so it seemed to those who had any
pause, say, to post a letter, or at a club window in
. The stream of landaus, victorias and hansom cabs
ssant; for the season was beginning. In the quieter
usicians doled out their frail and for the most part
oly pipe of sound, which was echoed, or parodied, here
ees of Hyde Park, here in St James's by the twitter of
and the sudden outbursts of the amorous but inter-
thrush. The pigeons in the squares shuffled in the tree
ing fall a twig or two, and crooned over and over again
by that was always interrupted. The gates at the Marble
l Apsley House were blocked in the afternoon by ladies
-coloured dresses wearing bustles, and by gentlemen in
ats carrying canes, wearing carnations. Here came the
and as she passed hats were lifted. In the basements of
avenues of the residential quarters servant girls in cap
on prepared tea. Deviously ascending from the base-
teapot was placed on the table, and virgins and
nds that had staunched the sores of Ber-
n carefully measured out one, two, three,
When the sun went down a million little
the eyes in peacocks' feathers, opened in
nevertheless broad stretches of darkness
ement. The mixed light of the lamps and
reflected equally in the placid waters of the

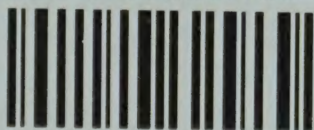
Round Pond and the Serpentine. Diners-out, trotting over th Bridge in hansom cabs, looked for a moment at the charmin vista. At length the moon rose and its polished coin, thoug obscured now and then by wisps of cloud, shone out with se enity, with severity, or perhaps with complete indifferenc Slowly wheeling, like the rays of a searchlight, the days, th weeks, the years passed one after another across the sky.

Colonel Abel Pargiter was sitting after luncheon in his clu talking. Since his companions in the leather armchairs wer men of his own type, men who had been soldiers, civil servants men who had now retired, they were reviving with old joke and stories now their past in India, Africa, Egypt, and then, by natural transition, they turned to the present. It was a questio of some appointment, of some possible appointment.

Suddenly the youngest and the sprucest of the three lean forward. Yesterday he had lunched with ... Here the voice o the speaker fell. The others bent towards him; with a brief wav of his hand Colonel Abel dismissed the servant who was remov ing the coffee cups. The three baldish and greyish heads re mained close together for a few minutes. Then Colonel Abe threw himself back in his chair. The curious gleam which had come into all their eyes when Major Elkin began his story had faded completely from Colonel Pargiter's face. He sat starin ahead of him with bright blue eyes that seemed a little screwed up, as if the glare of the East were still in them; and puckered at the corners as if the dust were still in them. Some thought had struck him that made what the others were saying of no interest to him; indeed, it was disagreeable to him. He rose and looked out of the window down into Piccadilly. Holding his cigar suspended he looked down on the tops of omnibuses, hansom cabs, victorias, vans and landaus. He was out of it all, his atti- tude seemed to say; he had no longer any finger in that pie. Gloom settled on his red handsome face as he stood gazing. Suddenly a thought struck him. He had a question to ask; he turned to ask it; but his friends were gone. The little group had broken up. Elkins was already hurrying through the door; Brand had moved off to talk to another man. Colonel Pargiter shut his mouth on the thing he might have said, and turned back again to the window overlooking Piccadilly. Everybody in the crowded street, it seemed, had some end in view. Everybody

as hurrying along to keep some appointment. Even the ladies
 their victorias and broughams were trotting down Piccadilly
ı some errand or other. People were coming back to London:
ey were settling in for the season. But for him there would be
› season; for him there was nothing to do. His wife was dying;
ıt she did not die. She was better today; would be worse
morrow; a new nurse was coming; and so it went on. He
cked up a paper and turned over the pages. He looked at a
cture of the west front of Cologne Cathedral. He tossed the
ıper back into its place among the other papers. One of these
ıys – that was his euphemism for the time when his wife was
ead – he would give up London, he thought, and live in the
ountry. But then there was the house; then there were the
ildren; and there was also . . . his face changed; it became less
scontented; but also a little furtive and uneasy.

He had somewhere to go, after all. While they were gossiping
e had kept that thought at the back of his mind. When he
ırned round and found them gone, that was the balm he
apped on his wound. He would go and see Mira; Mira at least
ould be glad to see him. Thus when he left the club he turned
ot East, where the busy men were going; nor West where his
wn house in Abercorn Terrace was; but took his way along the
ard paths through the Green Park towards Westminster. The
ass was very green; the leaves were beginning to shoot; little
een claws, like birds' claws, were pushing out from the
anches; there was a sparkle, an animation everywhere; the air
nelt clean and brisk. But Colonel Pargiter saw neither the grass
or the trees. He marched through the Park, in his closely but-
ned coat, looking straight ahead of him. But when he came to
Vestminster he stopped. He did not like this part of the business
 all. Every time he approached the little street that lay under
ıe huge bulk of the Abbey, the street of dingy little houses,
ith yellow curtains and cards in the window, the street where
ıe muffin man seemed always to be ringing his bell, where
ildren scre ite chalk-marks
ı the paver , looked to the
ft; and the hirty and rang
ıe bell. He g d with his head
ther sunk. g on that door-
ep. He did ot like it when
Irs Sims let l in the house;



there were always dirty clothes hanging on a line in the ba
garden. He went up the stairs, sulkily and heavily, and enter
the sitting-room.

Nobody was there; he was too early. He looked round t
room with distaste. There were too many little objects abou
He felt out of place, and altogether too large as he stood uprig
before the draped fireplace in front of a screen upon which w
painted a kingfisher in the act of alighting on some bulrushe
Footsteps scurried about hither and thither on the floor abov
Was there somebody with her? he asked himself listening. Ch
dren screamed in the street outside. It was sordid; it was mea
it was furtive. One of these days, he said to himself . . . but t
door opened and his mistress, Mira, came in.

'Oh Bogy, dear!' she exclaimed. Her hair was very untidy; s
was a little fluffy-looking; but she was very much younger th
he was and really glad to see him, he thought. The little d
bounced up at her.

'Lulu, Lulu,' she cried, catching the little dog in one han
while she put the other to her hair, 'come and let Uncle Bog
look at you.'

The Colonel settled himself in the creaking basket-chair. S
put the dog on his knee. There was a red patch – possib
eczema – behind one of its ears. The Colonel put on his glass
and bent down to look at the dog's ear. Mira kissed him whe
his collar met his neck. Then his glasses fell off. She snatche
them and put them on the dog. The old boy was out of spiri
today, she felt. In that mysterious world of clubs and family li
of which he never spoke to her something was wrong. He ha
come before she had done her hair, which was a nuisance. Bu
her duty was to distract him. So she flitted – her figure, e
larging as it was, still allowed her to glide between table an
chair – hither and thither; removed the fire-screen and set
light, before he could stop her, to the grudging lodging-hous
fire. Then she perched on the arm of his chair.

'Oh, Mira!' she said, glancing at herself in the looking-gla
and shifting her hairpins, 'what a dreadfully untidy girl yo
are!' She loosed a long coil and let it fall over her shoulders.
was beautiful gold-glancing hair still, though she was neari
forty and had, if the truth were known, a daughter of eig
boarded out with friends at Bedford. The hair began to fall of i
own accord, of its own weight, and Bogy seeing it fall stoope

and kissed her hair. A barrel-organ had begun to play down the street and the children all rushed in that direction, leaving a sudden silence. The Colonel began to stroke her neck. He began fumbling, with the hand that had lost two fingers, rather lower down, where the neck joins the shoulders. Mira slipped on to the floor and leant her back against his knee.

Then there was a creaking on the stairs; someone tapped as if to warn them of her presence. Mira at once pinned her hair together, got up and shut the door.

The Colonel began in his methodical way to examine the dog's ears again. Was it eczema? or was it not eczema? He looked at the red patch, then set the dog on its legs in the basket and waited. He did not like the prolonged whispering on the landing outside. At length Mira came back; she looked worried; and when she looked worried she looked old. She began hunting about under cushions and covers. She wanted her bag, she said; where had she put her bag? In that litter of things, the Colonel thought it might be anywhere. It was a lean, poverty-stricken-looking bag when she found it under the cushions in the corner of the sofa. She turned it upside down. Pocket handkerchiefs, screwed up bits of paper, silver and coppers fell out as she shook it. But there should have been a sovereign, she said. 'I'm sure I had one yesterday,' she murmured.

'How much?' said the Colonel.

'It came to one pound – no, it came to one pound eight and sixpence,' she said, muttering something about the washing. The Colonel slipped two sovereigns out of his little gold case and gave them to her. She took them and there was more whispering on the landing.

'Washing . . .?' thought the Colonel, looking round the room. It was a dingy little hole; but being so much older than she was it did not do to ask questions about the washing. Here she was again. She flitted across the room and sat on the floor and put her head against his knee. The grudging fire which had been flickering feebly had died down now. 'Let it be,' he said impatiently, as she took up the poker. 'Let it go out.' She resigned the poker. The dog snored; the barrel organ played. His hand began its voyage up and down her neck, in and out of the long thick hair. In this small room, so close to the other houses, dusk came quickly; and the curtains were half drawn. He drew her to him; he kissed her on the nape of the neck; and then the

hand that had lost two fingers began to fumble rather lowe down where the neck joins the shoulders.

A sudden squall of rain struck the pavement, and the chil dren, who had been skipping in and out of their chalk cages scudded away home. The elderly street singer, who had beer swaying along the kerb, with a fisherman's cap stuck jauntil on the back of his head, lustily chanting 'Count your blessings Count your blessings—' turned up his coat collar and tool refuge under the portico of a public house where he finished hi injunction: 'Count your blessings. Every One.' Then the sur shone again; and dried the pavement.

'It's not boiling,' said Milly Pargiter, looking at the tea-kettle She was sitting at the round table in the front drawing-room o the house in Abercorn Terrace. 'Not nearly boiling,' she re peated. The kettle was an old-fashioned brass kettle, chasec with a design of roses that was almost obliterated. A feeble littl flame flickered up and down beneath the brass bowl. Her siste Delia, lying back in a chair beside her, watched it too. 'Must a kettle boil?' she asked idly after a moment, as if she expected nc answer, and Milly did not answer. They sat in silence watching the little flame on a tuft of yellow wick. There were many plates and cups as if other people were coming; but at the moment they were alone. The room was full of furniture. Op posite them stood a Dutch cabinet with blue china on the shelves; the sun of the April evening made a bright stain here and there on the glass. Over the fireplace the portrait of a red haired young woman in white muslin holding a basket of flowers on her lap smiled down on them.

Milly took a hairpin from her head and began to fray the wick into separate strands so as to increase the size of the flame.

'But that doesn't do any good,' Delia said irritably as she watched her. She fidgeted. Everything seemed to take such ar intolerable time. Then Crosby came in and said, should she boi the kettle in the kitchen? and Milly said No. How can I put a stop to this fiddling and trifling, she said to herself, tapping a knife on the table and looking at the feeble flame that her siste was teasing with a hairpin. A gnat's voice began to wail under

the kettle; but here the door burst open again and a little girl in a stiff pink frock came in.

'I think Nurse might have put you on a clean pinafore,' said Milly severely, imitating the manner of a grown-up person. There was a green smudge on her pinafore as if she had been climbing trees.

'It hadn't come back from the wash,' said Rose, the little girl, grumpily. She looked at the table, but there was no question of tea yet.

Milly applied her hairpin to the wick again. Delia leant back and glanced over her shoulder out of the window. From where she sat she could see the front door-steps.

'Now, there's Martin,' she said gloomily. The door slammed; books were slapped down on the hall table, and Martin, a boy of twelve, came in. He had the red hair of the woman in the picture, but it was rumpled.

'Go and make yourself tidy,' said Delia severely. 'You've plenty of time,' she added. 'The kettle isn't boiling yet.'

They all looked at the kettle. It still kept up its faint melancholy singing as the little flame flickered under the swinging bowl of brass.

'Blast that kettle,' said Martin, turning sharply away.

'Mama wouldn't like you to use language like that,' Milly reproved him as if in imitation of an older person; for their mother had been ill so long that both sisters had taken to imitating her manner with the children. The door opened again.

'The tray, Miss . . .' said Crosby, keeping the door open with her foot. She had an invalid's tray in her hands.

'The tray,' said Milly. 'Now who's going to take up the tray?' Again she imitated the manner of an older person who wishes to be tactful with children.

'Not you, Rose. It's too heavy. Let Martin carry it; and you can go with him. But don't stay. Just tell Mama what you've been doing; and then the kettle . . . the kettle. . . .'

Here she applied her hairpin to the wick again. A thin puff of steam issued from the serpent-shaped spout. At first intermittent, it gradually became more and more powerful, until, just as they heard steps on the stairs, one jet of powerful steam issued from the spout.

'It's boiling!' Milly exclaimed. 'It's boiling!'

They ate in silence. The sun, judging from the changing ligh on the glass of the Dutch cabinet, seemed to be going in and ou Sometimes a bowl shone deep blue; then became livid. Ligh rested furtively upon the furniture in the other room. Here wa a pattern; here was a bald patch. Somewhere there's beaut Delia thought, somewhere there's freedom, and somewhere, sh thought, *he* is – wearing his white flower. . . . But a stick grate in the hall.

'It's Papa!' Milly exclaimed warningly.

Instantly Martin wriggled out of his father's armchair; Deli sat upright. Milly at once moved forward a very large ros sprinkled cup that did not match the rest. The Colonel stood a the door and surveyed the group rather fiercely. His small blu eyes looked round them as if to find fault; at the moment ther was no particular fault to find; but he was out of temper; the knew at once before he spoke that he was out of temper.

'Grubby little ruffian,' he said, pinching Rose by the ear as h passed her. She put her hand at once over the stain on her pin afore.

'Mama all right?' he said, letting himself down in one soli mass into the big armchair. He detested tea; but he alway sipped a little from the huge old cup that had been his father's He raised it and sipped perfunctorily.

'And what have you all been up to?' he asked.

He looked round him with the smoky but shrewd gaze tha could be genial, but was surly now.

'Delia had her music lesson, and I went to Whiteley's—' Mill began, rather as if she were a child reciting a lesson.

'Spending money, eh?' said her father sharply, but not un kindly.

'No, Papa; I told you. They sent the wrong sheets—'

'And you, Martin?' Colonel Pargiter asked, cutting short hi daughter's statement. 'Bottom of the class as usual?'

'Top!' shouted Martin, bolting the word out as if he had re strained it with difficulty until this moment.

'Hm – you don't say so,' said his father. His gloom relaxed little. He put his hand into his trouser pocket and brought out handful of silver. His children watched him as he tried to singl out one sixpence from all the florins. He had lost two fingers o the right hand in the Mutiny, and the muscles had shrunk s that the right hand resembled the claw of some aged bird. H

shuffled and fumbled; but as he always ignored the injury, his children dared not help him. The shiny knobs of the mutilated fingers fascinated Rose.

'Here you are, Martin,' he said at length, handing the sixpence to his son. Then he sipped his tea again and wiped his moustaches.

'Where's Eleanor?' he said at last, as if to break the silence.

'It's her Grove day,' Milly reminded him.

'Oh, her Grove day,' muttered the Colonel. He stirred the sugar round and round in the cup as if to demolish it.

'The dear old Levys,' said Delia tentatively. She was his favourite daughter; but she felt uncertain in his present mood how much she could venture.

He said nothing.

'Bertie Levy's got six toes on one foot,' Rose piped up suddenly. The others laughed. But the Colonel cut them short.

'You hurry up and get off to your prep., my boy,' he said, glancing at Martin, who was still eating.

'Let him finish his tea, Papa,' said Milly, again imitating the manner of an older person.

'And the new nurse?' the Colonel asked, drumming on the edge of the table. 'Has she come?'

'Yes . . .' Milly began. But there was a rustling in the hall and in came Eleanor. It was much to their relief; especially to Milly's. Thank goodness, there's Eleanor she thought, looking up – the soother, the maker-up of quarrels, the buffer between her and the intensities and strifes of family life. She adored her sister. She would have called her goddess and endowed her with a beauty that was not hers, with clothes that were not hers, had she not been carrying a pile of little mottled books and two black gloves. Protect me, she thought, handing her a teacup, who am such a mousy, downtrodden inefficient little chit, compared with Delia, who always gets her way, while I'm always snubbed by Papa, who was grumpy for some reason. The Colonel smiled at Eleanor. And the red dog on the hearthrug looked up too and wagged his tail, as if he recognized her for one of those satisfactory women who give you a bone, but wash their hands afterwards. She was the eldest of the daughters, about twenty-two, no beauty, but healthy, and though tired at the moment, naturally cheerful.

'I'm sorry I'm late,' she said. 'I got kept. And I didn't expect—' She looked at her father.

'I got off earlier than I thought,' he said hastily. 'The meeting—' he stopped short. There had been another row with Mira.

'And how's your Grove, eh?' he added.

'Oh, my Grove—' she repeated; but Milly handed her the covered dish.

'I got kept,' Eleanor said again, helping herself. She began to eat; the atmosphere lightened.

'Now tell us, Papa,' said Delia boldly – she was his favourite daughter – 'what you've been doing with yourself. Had any adventures?'

The remark was unfortunate.

'There aren't any adventures for an old fogy like me,' said the Colonel surlily. He ground the grains of sugar against the walls of his cup. Then he seemed to repent of his gruffness; he pondered for a moment.

'I met old Burke at the Club; asked me to bring one of you to dinner; Robin's back, on leave,' he said.

He drank up his tea. Some drops fell on his little pointed beard. He took out his large silk handkerchief and wiped his chin impatiently. Eleanor, sitting on her low chair, saw a curious look first on Milly's face, then on Delia's. She had an impression of hostility between them. But they said nothing. They went on eating and drinking until the Colonel took up his cup, saw there was nothing in it, and put it down firmly with a little chink. The ceremony of tea-drinking was over.

'Now, my boy, take yourself off and get on with your prep.,' he said to Martin.

Martin withdrew the hand that was stretched towards a plate.

'Cut along,' said the Colonel imperiously. Martin got up and went, drawing his hand reluctantly along the chairs and tables as if to delay his passage. He slammed the door rather sharply behind him. The Colonel rose and stood upright among them in his tightly buttoned frock-coat.

'And I must be off too,' he said. But he paused a moment, as if there was nothing particular for him to be off to. He stood there very erect among them, as if he wished to give some order, but could not at the moment think of any order to give. Then he recollected.

'I wish one of you would remember,' he said, addressing his

daughters impartially, 'to write to Edward. . . . Tell him to write to Mama.'

'Yes,' said Eleanor.

He moved towards the door. But he stopped.

'And let me know when Mama wants to see me,' he remarked. Then he paused and pinched his youngest daughter by the ear.

'Grubby little ruffian,' he said, pointing to the green stain on her pinafore. She covered it with her hand. At the door he paused again.

'Don't forget,' he said, fumbling with the handle, 'don't forget to write to Edward.' At last he had turned the handle and was gone.

They were silent. There was something strained in the atmosphere, Eleanor felt. She took one of the little books that she had dropped on the table and laid it open on her knee. But she did not look at it. Her glance fixed itself rather absent-mindedly upon the farther room. The trees were coming out in the back garden; there were little leaves – little ear-shaped leaves on the bushes. The sun was shining, fitfully; it was going in and it was going out, lighting up now this, now—

'Eleanor,' Rose interrupted. She held herself in a way that was oddly like her father's.

'Eleanor,' she repeated in a low voice, for her sister was not attending.

'Well?' said Eleanor, looking at her.

'I want to go to Lamley's,' said Rose.

She looked the image of her father, standing there with her hands behind her back.

'It's too late for Lamley's,' said Eleanor.

'They don't shut till seven,' said Rose.

'Then ask Martin to go with you,' said Eleanor.

The little girl moved off slowly towards the door. Eleanor took up her account-books again.

'But you're not to go alone, Rose; you're not to go alone,' she said, looking up over them as Rose reached the door. Nodding her head in silence, Rose disappeared.

She went upstairs. She paused outside her mother's bedroom and snuffed the sour-sweet smell that seemed to hang about the

jugs, the tumblers, the covered bowls on the table outside th door. Up she went again, and stopped outside the schoolroor door. She did not want to go in, for she had quarrelled wit Martin. They had quarrelled first about Erridge and the micro scope and then about shooting Miss Pym's cats next door. Bu Eleanor had told her to ask him. She opened the door.

'Hullo, Martin—' she began.

He was sitting at a table with a book propped in front of him muttering to himself – perhaps it was Greek, perhaps it wa Latin.

'Eleanor told me—' she began, noting how flushed he lookec and how his hand closed on a bit of paper as if he were going t screw it into a ball. 'To ask you . . .' she began, and braced her self and stood with her back against the door.

Eleanor leant back in her chair. The sun now was on th trees in the back garden. The buds were beginning to swell. Th spring light of course showed up the shabbiness of the chair covers. The large armchair had a dark stain on it where he father had rested his head, she noticed. But what a number o chairs there were – how roomy, how airy it was after that bed room where old Mrs Levy— But Milly and Delia were both silent. It was the question of the dinner-party, she remembered Which of them was to go? They both wanted to go. She wishec people would not say, 'Bring one of your daughters.' She wishec they would say, 'Bring Eleanor', or 'Bring Milly', or 'Bring Delia', instead of lumping them all together. Then there coulc be no question.

'Well,' said Delia abruptly, 'I shall . . .'

She got up as if she were going somewhere. But she stopped Then she strolled over to the window that looked out on to the street. The houses opposite all had the same little front gardens the same steps; the same pillars; the same bow windows. Bu now dusk was falling and they looked spectral and insubstantia in the dim light. Lamps were being lit; a light glowed in the drawing-room opposite; then the curtains were drawn, and the room was blotted out. Delia stood looking down at the street. A woman of the lower classes was wheeling a perambulator; an old man tottered along with his hands behind his back. Then the street was empty; there was a pause. Here came a hansom jingling down the road. Delia was momentarily interested. Was

it going to stop at their door or not? She gazed more intently. But then, to her regret, the cabman jerked his reins, the horse stumbled on; the cab stopped two doors lower down.

'Someone's calling on the Stapletons,' she called back, holding apart the muslin blind. Milly came and stood beside her sister, and together, through the slit, they watched a young man in a top-hat get out of the cab. He stretched his hand up to pay the driver.

'Don't be caught looking,' said Eleanor warningly. The young man ran up the steps into the house; the door shut upon him and the cab drove away.

But for the moment the two girls stood at the window looking into the street. The crocuses were yellow and purple in the front gardens. The almond trees and privets were tipped with green. A sudden gust of wind tore down the street, blowing a piece of paper along the pavement; and a little swirl of dry dust followed after. Above the roofs was one of those red and fitful London sunsets that make window after window burn gold. There was a wildness in the spring evening; even here, in Abercorn Terrace the light was changing from gold to black, from black to gold. Dropping the blind, Delia turned, and coming back into the drawing-room, said suddenly:

'Oh my God!'

Eleanor, who had taken her books again, looked up disturbed.

'Eight times eight . . .' she said aloud. 'What's eight times eight?'

Putting her finger on the page to mark the place, she looked at her sister. As she stood there with her head thrown back and her hair red in the sunset glow, she looked for a moment defiant, even beautiful. Beside her Milly was mouse-coloured and nondescript.

'Look here, Delia,' said Eleanor, shutting her book, 'you've only got to wait . . .' She meant but she could not say it, 'until Mama dies.'

'No, no, no,' said Delia, stretching her arms out. 'It's hopeless . . .' she began. But she broke off, for Crosby had come in. She was carrying a tray. One by one with an exasperating little chink she put the cups, the plates, the knives, the jam-pots, the dishes of cake and the dishes of bread and butter, on the tray. Then, balancing it carefully in front of her, she went out. There was a pause. In she came again and folded the table-cloth and

moved the tables. Again there was a pause. A moment or t
later back she came carrying two silk-shaded lamps. She set c
in the front room, one in the back room. Then she went, cre
ing in her cheap shoes, to the window and drew the curtai
They slid with a familiar click along the brass rod, and soon t
windows were obscured by thick sculptured folds of clar
coloured plush. When she had drawn the curtains in bc
rooms, a profound silence seemed to fall upon the drawi
room. The world outside seemed thickly and entirely cut c
Far away down the next street they heard the voice of a str
hawker droning; the heavy hooves of van horses clopped slow
down the road. For a moment wheels ground on the road; th
they died out and the silence was complete.

Two yellow circles of light fell under the lamps. Eleanor dre
her chair up under one of them, bent her head and went
with the part of her work that she always left to the last l
cause she disliked it so much – adding up figures. Her lips mov
and her pencil made little dots on the paper as she added eig
to sixes, fives to fours.

'There!' she said at last. 'That's done. Now I'll go and sit wi
Mama.'

She stooped to pick up her gloves.

'No,' said Milly, throwing aside a magazine she had opene
'I'll go ...'

Delia suddenly emerged from the back room in which s
had been prowling.

'I've nothing whatever to do,' she said briefly. 'I'll go.'

She went upstairs, step by step, very slowly. When she can
to the bedroom door with the jugs and glasses on the table ou
side, she paused. The sour-sweet smell of illness slightly sic
ened her. She could not force herself to go in. Through the litt
window at the end of the passage she could see flaming
coloured curls of cloud lying on a pale-blue sky. After the du
of the drawing-room, her eyes dazzled. She seemed fixed the
for a moment by the light. Then on the floor above she hear
children's voices – Martin and Rose quarrelling.

'Don't then!' she heard Rose say. A door slammed. Sh
paused. Then she drew in a deep breath of air, looked once mo
at the fiery sky, and tapped on the bedroom door.

The nurse rose quietly; put her finger to her lips, and left th

room. Mrs Pargiter was asleep. Lying in a cleft of the pillows with one hand under her cheek, Mrs Pargiter moaned slightly as if she wandered in a world where even in sleep little obstacles lay across her path. Her face was pouched and heavy; the skin was stained with brown patches; the hair which had been red was now white, save that there were queer yellow patches in it, as if some locks had been dipped in the yolk of an egg. Bare of all rings save her wedding ring, her fingers alone seemed to indicate that she had entered the private world of illness. But she did not look as if she were dying; she looked as if she might go on existing in this borderland between life and death for ever. Delia could see no change in her. As she sat down, everything seemed to be at full tide in her. A long narrow glass by the bedside reflected a section of the sky; it was dazzled at the moment with red light. The dressing-table was illuminated. The light struck on silver bottles and on glass bottles, all set out in the perfect order of things that are not used. At this hour of the evening the sick-room had an unreal cleanliness, quiet and order. There by the bedside was a little table set with spectacles, prayer-book and a vase of lilies of the valley. The flowers, too, looked unreal. There was nothing to do but to look.

She stared at the yellow drawing of her grandfather with the high light on his nose; at the photograph of her Uncle Horace in his uniform; at the lean and twisted figure on the crucifix to the right.

'But you don't believe in it!' she said savagely, looking at her mother sunk in sleep. 'You don't want to die.'

She longed for her to die. There she was – soft, decayed but everlasting, lying in the cleft of the pillows, an obstacle, a prevention, an impediment to all life. She tried to whip up some feeling of affection, of pity. For instance, that summer, she told herself, at Sidmouth, when she called me up the garden steps. . . . But the scene melted as she tried to look at it. There was the other scene of course – the man in the frock-coat with the flower in his button-hole. But she had sworn not to think of that till bedtime. What then should she think of? Grandpapa with the white light on his nose? The prayer-book? The lilies of the valley? Or the looking-glass? The sun had gone in; the glass was dim and reflected now only a dun-coloured patch of sky. She could resist no longer.

'Wearing a white flower in his button-hole,' she began. It quired a few minutes' preparation. There must be a hall; ban of palms; a floor beneath them crowded with people's head The charm was beginning to work. She became permeated wi delicious starts of flattering and exciting emotion. She was the platform; there was a huge audience; everybody was shou ing, waving handkerchiefs, hissing and whistling. Then s stood up. She rose all in white in the middle of the platform; I Parnell was by her side.

'I am speaking in the cause of Liberty,' she began, throwi out her hands, 'in the cause of Justice. . . .' They were standi side by side. He was very pale but his dark eyes glowed. I turned to her and whispered. . . .

There was a sudden interruption. Mrs Pargiter had raised h self on her pillows.

'Where am I?' she cried. She was frightened and bewildere as she often was on waking. She raised her hand; she seemed appeal for help. 'Where am I?' she repeated. For a moment Del was bewildered too. Where was she?

'Here, Mama! Here!' she said wildly. 'Here, in your ov room.'

She laid her hand on the counterpane. Mrs Pargiter clutched nervously. She looked round the room as if she were seekin someone. She did not seem to recognize her daughter.

'What's happening?' she said. 'Where am I?' Then she looke at Delia and remembered.

'Oh, Delia – I was dreaming,' she murmured half apol getically. She lay for a moment looking out of the window. Th lamps were being lit, and a sudden soft spurt of light came the street outside.

'It's been a fine day . . .' she hesitated, 'for . . .' It seemed as she could not remember what for.

'A lovely day, yes, Mama,' Delia repeated with mechanic cheerfulness.

'. . . for . . .' her mother tried again.

What day was it? Delia could not remember.

'. . . for your Uncle Digby's birthday,' Mrs Pargiter at la brought out.

'Tell him from me – tell him how very glad I am.'

'I'll tell him,' said Delia. She had forgotten her uncle's birth day; but her mother was punctilious about such things.

'Aunt Eugénie—' she began.

But her mother was staring at the dressing-table. Some gleam from the lamp outside made the white cloth look extremely white.

'Another clean table-cloth!' Mrs Pargiter murmured peevishly. 'The expense, Delia, the expense – that's what worries me—'

'That's all right, Mama,' said Delia dully. Her eyes were fixed upon her grandfather's portrait; why, she wondered, had the artist put a dab of white chalk on the tip of his nose?

'Aunt Eugénie brought you some flowers,' she said.

For some reason Mrs Pargiter seemed pleased. Her eyes rested contemplatively on the clean table-cloth that had suggested the washing bill a moment before.

'Aunt Eugénie ...' she said. 'How well I remember' – her voice seemed to get fuller and rounder – 'the day the engagement was announced. We were all of us in the garden; there came a letter.' She paused. 'There came a letter,' she repeated. Then she said no more for a time. She seemed to be going over some memory.

'The dear little boy died, but save for that ...' She stopped again. She seemed weaker tonight, Delia thought; and a start of joy ran through her. Her sentences were more broken than usual. What little boy had died? She began counting the twists on the counterpane as she waited for her mother to speak.

'You know all the cousins used to come together in the summer,' her mother suddenly resumed. 'There was your Uncle Horace. . . .'

'The one with the glass eye,' said Delia.

'Yes. He hurt his eye on the rocking-horse. The aunts thought so much of Horace. They would say ...' Here there was a long pause. She seemed to be fumbling to find the exact words.

'When Horace comes ... remember to ask him about the dining-room door.'

A curious amusement seemed to fill Mrs Pargiter. She actually laughed. She must be thinking of some long-past family joke, Delia supposed, as she watched the smile flicker and fade away. There was complete silence. Her mother lay with her eyes shut; the hand with the single ring, the white and wasted hand, lay on the counterpane. In the silence they could hear a coal click in the grate and a street hawker droning down the road. Mrs

Pargiter said no more. She lay perfectly still. Then she sig profoundly.

The door opened, and the nurse came in. Delia rose and w out. Where am I? she asked herself, staring at a white stained pink by the setting sun. For a moment she seemed to in some borderland between life and death. Where am I? s repeated, looking at the pink jug, for it all looked strange. Th she heard water rushing and feet thudding on the floor above.

'Here you are, Rosie,' said Nurse, looking up from the wh of the sewing-machine as Rose came in.

The nursery was brightly lit; there was an unshaded lamp the table. Mrs C., who came every week with the washing, w sitting in the armchair with a cup in her hand. 'Go and get yo sewing, there's a good girl,' said Nurse as Rose shook hands wi Mrs C., 'or you'll never be done in time for Papa's birthday,' s added, clearing a space on the nursery table.

Rose opened the table drawer and took out the boot-bag th she was embroidering with a design of blue and red flowers f her father's birthday. There were still several clusters of lit pencilled roses to be worked. She spread it on the table a examined it as Nurse resumed what she was saying to Mrs about Mrs Kirby's daughter. But Rose did not listen.

Then I shall go by myself, she decided, straightening out t boot-bag. If Martin won't come with me, then I shall go myself.

'I left my work-box in the drawing-room,' she said aloud.

'Well, then, go and fetch it,' said Nurse, but she was not tending; she wanted to go on with what she was saying to M C. about the grocer's daughter.

Now the adventure has begun, Rose said to herself as she sto on tiptoe to the night nursery. Now she must provide hers with ammunition and provisions; she must steal Nurse's latc key; but where was it? Every night it was hidden in a new pla for fear of burglars. It would be either under the handkerchi case or in the little box where she kept her mother's gold watc chain. There it was. Now she had her pistol and her shot, s thought, taking her own purse from her own drawer, a enough provisions, she thought, as she hung her hat and co over her arm, to last a fortnight.

She stole past the nursery, down the stairs. She listened intently as she passed the schoolroom door. She must be careful not to tread on a dry branch, or to let any twig crack under her, she told herself, as she went on tiptoe. Again she stopped and listened as she passed her mother's bedroom door. All was silent. Then she stood for a moment on the landing, looking down into the hall. The dog was asleep on the mat; the coast was clear; the hall was empty. She heard voices murmuring in the drawing-room.

She turned the latch of the front door with extreme gentleness, and closed it with scarcely a click behind her. Until she was round the corner she crouched close to the wall so that nobody could see her. When she reached the corner under the laburnum tree she stood erect.

'I am Pargiter of Pargiter's Horse,' she said, flourishing her hand, 'riding to the rescue!'

She was riding by night on a desperate mission to a besieged garrison, she told herself. She had a secret message – she clenched her fist on her purse – to deliver to the General in person. All their lives depended upon it. The British flag was still flying on the central tower – Lamley's shop was the central tower; the General was standing on the roof of Lamley's shop with his telescope to his eye. All their lives depended upon her riding to them through the enemy's country. Here she was galloping across the desert. She began to trot. It was growing dark. The street lamps were being lit. The lamplighter was poking his stick up into the little trap-door; the trees in the front gardens made a wavering network of shadow on the pavement; the pavement stretched before her broad and dark. Then there was the crossing; and then there was Lamley's shop on the little island of shops opposite. She had only to cross the desert, to ford the river, and she was safe. Flourishing the arm that held the pistol, she clapped spurs to her horse and galloped down Melrose Avenue. As she ran past the pillar-box the figure of a man suddenly emerged under the gas lamp.

'The enemy!' Rose cried to herself. 'The enemy! Bang!' she cried, pulling the trigger of her pistol and looking him full in the face as she passed him. It was a horrid face: white, peeled, pock-marked; he leered at her. He put out his arm as if to stop her. He almost caught her. She dashed past him. The game was over.

She was herself again, a little girl who had disobeyed h
sister, in her house shoes, flying for safety to Lamley's shop.

Fresh-faced Mrs Lamley was standing behind the counte
folding up the newspapers. She was pondering among her tw
penny watches, cards of tools, toy boats and boxes of chea
stationery something pleasant, it seemed; for she was smilin
Then Rose burst in. She looked up enquiringly.

'Hullo, Rosie!' she exclaimed. 'What d'you want, my dear?'

She kept her hand on the pile of newspapers. Rose stood the
panting. She had forgotten what she had come for.

'I want the box of ducks in the window,' Rose at last remem
bered.

Mrs Lamley waddled round to fetch it.

'Isn't it rather late for a little girl like you to be out alone?' sh
asked, looking at her as if she knew she had come out in he
house shoes, disobeying her sister.

'Good-night, my dear, and run along home,' she said, givin
her the parcel. The child seemed to hesitate on the doorstep: sh
stood there staring at the toys under the hanging oil lamp; the
out she went reluctantly.

I gave my message to the General in person, she said to herse
as she stood outside on the pavement again. And this is th
trophy, she said, grasping the box under her arm. I am returnin
in triumph with the head of the chief rebel, she told herself, a
she surveyed the stretch of Melrose Avenue before her. I mus
set spurs to my horse and gallop. But the story no longe
worked. Melrose Avenue remained Melrose Avenue. She looke
down it. There was the long stretch of bare street in front o
her. The trees were trembling their shadows over the pavemen
The lamps stood at great distances apart, and there were poo
of darkness between. She began to trot. Suddenly, as she passe
the lamp-post, she saw the man again. He was leaning with hi
back against the lamp-post, and the light from the gas lam
flickered over his face. As she passed he sucked his lips in an
out. He made a mewing noise. But he did not stretch his hand
out at her; they were unbuttoning his clothes.

She fled past him. She thought that she heard him comin
after her. She heard his feet padding on the pavement. Every
thing shook as she ran; pink and black spots danced before he

eyes as she ran up the door-steps, fitted her key in the latch and opened the hall door. She did not care whether she made a noise or not. She hoped somebody would come out and speak to her. But nobody heard her. The hall was empty. The dog was asleep on the mat. Voices still murmured in the drawing-room.

'And when it does catch,' Eleanor was saying, 'it'll be much too hot.'

Crosby had piled the coals into a great black promontory. A plume of yellow smoke was sullenly twining round it; it was beginning to burn, and when it did burn it would be much too hot.

'She can see Nurse stealing the sugar, she says. She can see her shadow on the wall,' Milly was saying. They were talking about their mother.

'And then Edward,' she added, 'forgetting to write.'

'That reminds me,' said Eleanor. She must remember to write to Edward. But there would be time after dinner. She did not want to write; she did not want to talk; always when she came back from the Grove she felt as if several things were going on at the same time. Words went on repeating themselves in her mind – words and sights. She was thinking of old Mrs Levy, sitting propped up in bed with her white hair in a thick flop like a wig and her face cracked like an old glazed pot.

'Them that's been good to me, them I remember . . . them that's ridden in their coaches when I was a poor widder woman scrubbing and mangling—' Here she stretched out her arm, which was wrung and white like the root of a tree. 'Them that's been good to me, them I remember . . .' Eleanor repeated as she looked at the fire. Then the daughter came in who was working for a tailor. She wore pearls as big as hen's eggs; she had taken to painting her face; she was wonderfully handsome. But Milly made a little movement.

'I was thinking,' said Eleanor on the spur of the moment, 'the poor enjoy themselves more than we do.'

'The Levys?' said Milly absent-mindedly. Then she brightened.

'Do tell me about the Levys,' she added. Eleanor's relations with 'the poor' – the Levys, the Grubbs, the Paravicinis, the Zwinglers and the Cobbs – always amused her. But Eleanor did not like talking about 'the poor' as if they were people in a

book. She had a great admiration for Mrs Levy, who was dyin of cancer.

'Oh, they're much as usual,' she said sharply. Milly looked a her. Eleanor's 'broody' she thought. The family joke was, 'Loo out. Eleanor's broody. It's her Grove day.' Eleanor was ashamed but she always was irritable for some reason when she cam back from the Grove – so many different things were going or in her head at the same time: Canning Place; Abercorn Terrace this room; that room. There was the old Jewess sitting up in bec in her hot little room; then one came back here, and there was Mama ill; Papa grumpy; and Delia and Milly quarrelling about a party. . . . But she checked herself. She ought to try to say something to amuse her sister.

'Mrs Levy had her rent ready, for a wonder,' she said. 'Lily helps her. Lily's got a job at a tailor's in Shoreditch. She came in all covered with pearls and things. They do love finery – Jews,' she added.

'Jews?' said Milly. She seemed to consider the taste of the Jews; and then to dismiss it.

'Yes,' she said. 'Shiny.'

'She's extraordinarily handsome,' said Eleanor, thinking of the red cheeks and the white pearls.

Milly smiled; Eleanor always would stick up for the poor. She thought Eleanor the best, the wisest, the most remarkable person she knew.

'I believe you like going there more than anything,' she said. 'I believe you'd like to go and live there if you had your way,' she added, with a little sigh.

Eleanor shifted in her chair. She had her dreams, her plans, of course; but she did not want to discuss them.

'Perhaps you will, when you're married?' said Milly. There was something peevish yet plaintive in her voice. The dinner-party; the Burkes' dinner-party, Eleanor thought. She wished Milly did not always bring the conversation back to marriage. And what do they know about marriage? she asked herself. They stay at home too much, she thought; they never see anyone outside their own set. Here they are cooped up, day after day. . . . That was why she had said, 'The poor enjoy themselves more than we do.' It had struck her coming back into that drawing-room, with all the furniture and the flowers and the hospital nurses. . . . Again she stopped herself. She must wait till

she was alone – till she was brushing her teeth at night. When she was with the others she must stop herself from thinking of two things at the same time. She took the poker and struck the coal.

'Look! What a beauty!' she exclaimed. A flame danced on top of the coal, a nimble and irrelevant flame. It was the sort of flame they used to make when they were children, by throwing salt on the fire. She struck again, and a shower of gold-eyed sparks went volleying up the chimney. 'D'you remember,' she said, 'how we used to play at firemen, and Morris and I set the chimney on fire?'

'And Pippy went and fetched Papa,' said Milly. She paused. There was a sound in the hall. A stick grated; someone was hanging up a coat. Eleanor's eyes brightened. That was Morris – yes; she knew the sound he made. Now he was coming in. She looked round with a smile as the door opened. Milly jumped up.

Morris tried to stop her.

'Don't go—' he began.

'Yes!' she exclaimed. 'I shall go. I shall go and have a bath,' she added on the spur of the moment. She left them.

Morris sat down in the chair she had left empty. He was glad to find Eleanor alone. Neither of them spoke for a moment. They watched the yellow plume of smoke, and the little flame dancing nimbly, irrelevantly, here and there on the black promontory of coals. Then he asked the usual question:

'How's Mama?'

She told him; there was no change: 'except that she sleeps more,' she said. He wrinkled his forehead. He was losing his boyish look, Eleanor thought. That was the worst of the Bar, everyone said; one had to wait. He was devilling for Sanders Curry; and it was dreary work, hanging about the Courts all day, waiting.

'How's old Curry?' she asked – old Curry had a temper.

'A bit liverish,' said Morris grimly.

'And what have you been doing all day?' she asked.

'Nothing in particular,' he replied.

'Still Evans v. Carter?'

'Yes,' he said briefly.

'And who's going to win?' she asked.

'Carter, of course,' he replied.

Why 'of course' she wanted to ask? But she had said som thing silly the other day – something that showed that she h not been attending. She muddled things up; for example, wh was the difference between Common Law and the other kind law? She said nothing. They sat in silence, and watched t flame playing on the coals. It was a green flame, nimble, irr evant.

'D'you think I've been an awful fool,' he asked suddenl 'With all this illness, and Edward and Martin to be paid for Papa must find it a bit of a strain.' He wrinkled his brow up i the way that made her say to herself that he was losing h boyish look.

'Of course not,' she said emphatically. Of course it wou have been absurd for him to go into business; his passion wa for the Law.

'You'll be Lord Chancellor one of these days,' she said. 'I' sure of it.' He shook his head, smiling.

'Quite sure,' she said, looking at him as she used to look a him when he came back from school and Edward had all th prizes and Morris sat silent – she could see him now – bolting h food with nobody making a fuss of him. But even while sh looked, a doubt came over her. Lord Chancellor, she had sai Ought she not to have said Lord Chief Justice? She never coul remember which was which: and that was why he would no discuss Evans *v.* Carter with her.

She never told him about the Levys either, except by way of joke. That was the worst of growing up, she thought; the couldn't share things as they used to share them. When they me they never had time to talk as they used to talk – about things i general – they always talked about facts – little facts. She poke the fire. Suddenly a blare of sound rang through the room. I was Crosby applying herself to the gong in the hall. She wa like a savage wreaking vengeance upon some brazen victin Ripples of rough sound rang through the room. 'Lord, that's th dressing-bell!' said Morris. He got up and stretched himself. H raised his arms and held them for a moment suspended abov his head. That's what he'll look like when he's the father of family, Eleanor thought. He let his arms fall and left the room She sat brooding for a moment; then she roused herself. Wha must I remember? she asked herself. To write to Edward, sh mused, crossing over to her mother's writing-table. It'll be my

table now, she thought, looking at the silver candlestick, the miniature of her grandfather, the tradesmen's books – one had a gilt cow stamped on it – and the spotted walrus with a brush in its back that Martin had given his mother on her last birthday.

Crosby held open the door of the dining-room as she waited for them to come down. The silver paid for polishing, she thought. Knives and forks rayed out round the table. The whole room, with its carved chairs, oil paintings, the two daggers on the mantelpiece, and the handsome sideboard – all the solid objects that Crosby dusted and polished every day – looked at its best in the evening. Meat-smelling and serge-curtained by day, it looked lit up, semi-transparent in the evening. And they were a handsome family, she thought as they filed in – the young ladies in their pretty dresses of blue and white sprigged muslin; the gentlemen so spruce in their dinner jackets. She pulled the Colonel's chair out for him. He was always at his best in the evening; he enjoyed his dinner; and for some reason his gloom had vanished. He was in his jovial mood. His children's spirits rose as they noted it.

'That's a pretty frock you're wearing,' he said to Delia as he sat down.

'This old one?' she said, patting the blue muslin.

There was an opulence, an ease and a charm about him when he was in a good temper that she liked particularly. People always said she was like him; sometimes she was glad of it – tonight for instance. He looked so pink and clean and genial in his dinner-jacket. They became children again when he was in this mood, and were spurred on to make family jokes at which they all laughed for no particular reason.

'Eleanor's broody,' said her father, winking at them. 'It's her Grove day.'

Everybody laughed; Eleanor had thought he was talking about Rover, the dog, when in fact he was talking about Mrs Egerton, the lady. Crosby, who was handing the soup, crinkled up her face because she wanted to laugh too. Sometimes the Colonel made Crosby laugh so much that she had to turn away and pretend to be doing something at the sideboard.

'Oh, Mrs Egerton—' said Eleanor, beginning her soup.

'Yes, Mrs Egerton,' said her father, and went on telling his

story about Mrs Egerton, 'whose golden hair was said by th voice of slander not to be entirely her own.'

Delia liked listening to her father's stories about India. The were crisp, and at the same time romantic. They conveyed a atmosphere of officers dining together in mess jackets on a ver hot night with a huge silver trophy in the middle of the table.

He used always to be like this when we were small, sh thought. He used to jump over the bonfire on her birthday, sh remembered. She watched him flicking cutlets dexterously o to plates with his left hand. She admired his decision, hi common sense. Flicking the cutlets on to plates, he went on—

'Talking of the lovely Mrs Egerton reminds me – did I ever te you the story of old Badger Parkes and—'

'Miss—' said Crosby in a whisper, opening the door behin Eleanor's back. She whispered a few words to Eleanor privately

'I'll come,' said Eleanor, getting up.

'What's that – what's that?' said the Colonel, stopping in th middle of his sentence. Eleanor left the room.

'Some message from Nurse,' said Milly.

The Colonel, who had just helped himself to cutlets, held hi knife and fork in his hand. They all held their knives suspended Nobody liked to go on eating.

'Well, let's get on with our dinner,' said the Colonel, abruptly attacking his cutlet. He had lost his geniality. Morris helpe himself tentatively to potatoes. Then Crosby reappeared. Sh stood at the door, with her pale-blue eyes looking very promi nent.

'What is it, Crosby? What is it?' said the Colonel.

'The Mistress, sir, taken worse, I think, sir,' she said with a curious whimper in her voice. Everybody got up.

'You wait. I'll go and see,' said Morris. They all followed him out into the hall. The Colonel was still holding his dinner napkin. Morris ran upstairs; in a moment he came down again.

'Mama's had a fainting-fit,' he said to the Colonel. 'I'm going to fetch Prentice.' He snatched his hat and coat and ran down the front steps. They heard him whistling for a cab as they stood uncertainly in the hall.

'Finish your dinner, girls,' said the Colonel peremptorily. But he paced up and down the drawing-room, holding his dinner napkin in his hand.

'It has come,' Delia said to herself; 'it has come!' An extraordinary feeling of relief and excitement possessed her. Her father was pacing from one drawing-room to the other; she followed him in; but she avoided him. They were too much alike; each knew what the other was feeling. She stood at the window looking up the street. There had been a shower of rain. The street was wet; the roofs were shining. Dark clouds were moving across the sky; the branches were tossing up and down in the light of the street lamps. Something in her was tossing up and down too. Something unknown seemed to be approaching. Then a gulping sound behind her made her turn. It was Milly. She was standing by the mantelpiece under the picture of the white-robed girl with the flower-basket, and the tears slid slowly down her cheeks. Delia moved towards her; she ought to go up to her and put her arms round her shoulders; but she could not do it. Real tears were sliding down Milly's cheeks. But her own eyes were dry. She turned to the window again. The street was empty – only the branches were tossing up and down in the lamplight. The Colonel paced up and down; once he knocked against a table and said 'Damn!' They heard steps moving about in the room upstairs. They heard voices murmuring. Delia turned to the window.

A hansom came trotting down the street. Morris jumped out directly the cab stopped. Dr Prentice followed him. He went straight upstairs and Morris joined them in the drawing-room.

'Why not finish your dinner?' the Colonel said gruffly, coming to a halt and standing upright before them.

'Oh, after he's gone,' said Morris irritably.

The Colonel resumed his pacing.

Then he stopped his pacing, and stood with his hands behind him in front of the fire. He had a braced look as if he were holding himself ready for an emergency.

We're both acting, Delia thought to herself, stealing a glance at him, but he's doing it better than I am.

She looked out of the window again. The rain was falling. When it crossed the lamplight it glanced in long strips of silver light.

'It's raining,' she said in a low voice, but nobody answered her.

At last they heard footsteps on the stairs and Dr Prentice came in. He shut the door quietly but said nothing.

'Well?' said the Colonel, facing up to him.

There was a prolonged pause.

'How d'you find her?' said the Colonel.

Dr Prentice moved his shoulders slightly.

'She's rallied,' he said. 'For a moment,' he added.

Delia felt as if his words struck her violently a blow on th head. She sank down on the arm of a chair.

So you're not going to die, she said, looking at the girl balance on the trunk of a tree; she seemed to simper down at her daugh ter with smiling malice. You're not going to die – never, never she cried clenching her hands together beneath her mother' picture.

'Now, shall we get on with our dinner?' said the Colonel taking up the napkin which he had dropped on the drawing room table.

It was a pity – the dinner was spoilt, Crosby thought, bringin up the cutlets from the kitchen again. The meat was dried up and the potatoes had a brown crust on top of them. One of th candles was scorching its shade too, she observed as she put th dish down in front of the Colonel. Then she shut the door o them, and they began to eat their dinner.

All was quiet in the house. The dog slept on its mat at the foo of the stairs. All was quiet outside the sick-room door. A fain sound of snoring came from the bedroom where Martin la asleep. In the day nursery Mrs C. and the nurse had resume their supper, which they had interrupted when they hear sounds in the hall below. Rose lay asleep in the night nursery For some time she slept profoundly, curled round with th blankets tight twisted over her head. Then she stirred an stretched her arms out. Something had swum up on top of th blackness. An oval white shape hung in front of her dangling, a if it hung from a string. She half opened her eyes and looked a it. It bubbled with grey spots that went in and out. She wok completely. A face was hanging close to her as if it dangled on a bit of string. She shut her eyes; but the face was still there bubbling in and out, grey, white, purplish and pock-marked. Sh put out her hand to touch the big bed next hers. But it wa empty. She listened. She heard the clatter of knives and th chatter of voices in the day nursery across the passage. But sh could not sleep.

She made herself think of a flock of sheep penned up in a hurdle in a field. She made one of the sheep jump the hurdle; then another. She counted them as they jumped. One, two, three, four – they jumped over the hurdle. But the fifth sheep would not jump. It turned round and looked at her. Its long narrow face was grey; its lips moved; it was the face of the man at the pillar-box, and she was alone with it. If she shut her eyes there it was; if she opened them, there it was still.

She sat up in bed and cried out, 'Nurse! Nurse!'

There was dead silence everywhere. The clatter of knives and forks in the next room had ceased. She was alone with something horrible. Then she heard a shuffling in the passage. It came closer and closer. It was the man himself. His hand was on the door. The door opened. An angle of light fell across the wash-stand. The jug and basin were lit up. The man was actually in the room with her . . . but it was Eleanor.

'Why aren't you asleep?' said Eleanor. She put down her candle and began to straighten the bed-clothes. They were all crumpled up. She looked at Rose. Her eyes were very bright and her cheeks were flushed. What was the matter? Had they woken her, moving about downstairs in Mama's room?

'What's been keeping you awake?' she asked. Rose yawned again; but it was a sigh rather than a yawn. She could not tell Eleanor what she had seen. She had a profound feeling of guilt; for some reason she must lie about the face she had seen.

'I had a bad dream,' she said. 'I was frightened.' A queer nervous jerk ran through her body as she sat up in bed. What was the matter? Eleanor wondered, again. Had she been fighting with Martin? Had she been chasing cats in Miss Pym's garden again?

'Have you been chasing cats again?' she asked. 'Poor cats,' she added; 'they mind it just as much as you would,' she said. But she knew that Rose's fright had nothing to do with the cats. She was grasping her finger tightly; she was staring ahead of her with a queer look in her eyes.

'What was your dream about?' she asked, sitting down on the edge of the bed. Rose stared at her; she could not tell her; but at all costs Eleanor must be made to stay with her.

'I thought I heard a man in the room,' she brought out at last. 'A robber,' she added.

'A robber? Here?' said Eleanor. 'But Rose, how could a rob get into your nursery? There's Papa, there's Morris – they wo never let a robber come into your room.'

'No,' said Rose. 'Papa would kill him,' she added. There w something queer about the way she twitched.

'But what are you all doing?' she said restlessly. 'Haven't y gone to bed yet? Isn't it very late?'

'What are we all doing?' said Eleanor. 'We're sitting in t drawing-room. It's not very late.' As she spoke a faint sou boomed through the room. When the wind was in the rig direction they could hear St Paul's. The soft circles spread out the air: one, two, three, four – Eleanor counted eight, nine, te She was surprised that the strokes stopped so soon.

'There, it's only ten o'clock, you see,' she said. It had seem to her much later. But the last stroke dissolved in the air. ' now you'll go to sleep,' she said. Rose clutched her hand.

'Don't go, Eleanor; not yet,' she implored her.

'But tell me, what's frightened you?' Eleanor began. Som thing was being hidden from her, she was sure.

'I saw . . .' Rose began. She made a great effort to tell her t truth; to tell her about the man at the pillar-box. 'I saw . . .' s repeated. But here the door opened and Nurse came in.

'I don't know what's come over Rosie tonight,' she said, bu ling in. She felt a little guilty; she had stayed downstairs with t other servants gossiping about the mistress.

'She sleeps so sound generally,' she said, coming over to t bed.

'Now, here's Nurse,' said Eleanor. 'She's coming to bed. So y won't be frightened any more, will you?' She smoothed dov the bed-clothes and kissed her. She got up and took her candle

'Good-night, Nurse,' she said, turning to leave the room.

'Good-night, Miss Eleanor,' said Nurse, putting some sy pathy into her voice; for they were saying downstairs that t mistress couldn't last much longer.

'Turn over and go to sleep, dearie,' she said, kissing Rose the forehead. For she was sorry for the little girl who would soon be motherless. Then she slipped the silver links out of h cuffs and began to take the hairpins out of her hair, standing her petticoats in front of the yellow chest of drawers.

'I saw,' Eleanor repeated, as she shut the nursery door.

aw ...' What had she seen? Something horrible, something idden. But what? There it was, hidden behind her strained yes. She held the candle slightly slanting in her hand. Three rops of grease fell on the polished skirting before she noticed hem. She straightened the candle and walked down the stairs. he listened as she went. There was silence. Martin was asleep. Her mother was asleep. As she passed the doors and went down-tairs a weight seemed to descend on her. She paused, looking lown in to the hall. A blankness came over her. Where am I? he asked herself, staring at a heavy frame. What is that? She eemed to be alone in the midst of nothingness; yet must de-cend, must carry her burden – she raised her arms slightly, as f she were carrying a pitcher, an earthenware pitcher on her ead. Again she stopped. The rim of a bowl outlined itself upon er eyeballs; there was water in it; and something yellow. It vas the dog's bowl, she realized; that was the sulphur in the log's bowl; the dog was lying curled up at the bottom of the tairs. She stepped carefully over the body of the sleeping dog nd went into the drawing-room.

They all looked up as she came in; Morris had a book in his and but he was not reading; Milly had some stuff in her hand out she was not sewing; Delia was lying back in her chair, doing othing whatever. She stood there hesitating for a moment. Then she turned to the writing-table. 'I'll write to Edward,' she murmured. She took up the pen, but she hesitated. She found it lifficult to write to Edward, seeing him before her, when she took up the pen, when she smoothed the notepaper on the writing-table. His eyes were too close together; he brushed up his crest before the looking-glass in the lobby in a way that irritated her. 'Nigs' was her nickname for him. 'My dear Edward,' she began to write, choosing 'Edward' not 'Nigs' on this occasion.

Morris looked up from the book he was trying to read. The scratching of Eleanor's pen irritated him. She stopped; then she wrote; then she put her hand to her head. All the worries were put on her of course. Still she irritated him. She always asked questions; she never listened to the answers. He glanced at his book again. But what was the use of trying to read? The atmos-phere of suppressed emotion was distasteful to him. There was nothing that anybody could do, but there they all sat in

attitudes of suppressed emotion. Milly's stitching irritated hi and Delia lying back in her chair doing nothing as usual. The he was cooped up with all these women in an atmosphere unreal emotion. And Eleanor went on writing, writing, writin There was nothing to write about – but here she licked t envelope and dabbed down the stamp.

'Shall I take it?' he said, dropping his book.

He got up as if he were glad to have something to do. Elean went to the front door with him and stood holding it open whi he went to the pillar-box. It was raining gently, and as she stoo at the door, breathing in the mild damp air, she watched t curious shadows that trembled on the pavement under t trees. Morris disappeared under the shadows round the corne She remembered how she used to stand at the door when he w a small boy and went to a day school with a satchel in his han She used to wave to him; and when he got to the corner l always turned and waved back. It was a curious little cer mony, dropped now that they were both grown up. Tl shadows shook as she stood waiting; in a moment he emerge from the shadows. He came along the street and up the steps.

'He'll get that tomorrow,' he said – 'anyhow by the secon post.'

He shut the door and stooped to fasten the chain. It seemed t her, as the chain rattled, that they both accepted the fact th nothing more was going to happen tonight. They avoided eac other's eyes; neither of them wanted any more emotion tonigh They went back into the drawing-room.

'Well,' said Eleanor, looking round her, 'I think I shall go t bed. Nurse will ring,' she said, 'if she wants anything.'

'We may as well all go,' said Morris. Milly began to roll up he embroidery. Morris began to rake out the fire.

'What an absurd fire—' he exclaimed irritably. The coa were all stuck together. They were blazing fiercely.

Suddenly a bell rang.

'Nurse!' Eleanor exclaimed. She looked at Morris. She left th room hurriedly. Morris followed her.

But what's the good? Delia thought to herself. It's onl another false alarm. She got up. 'It's only Nurse,' she said t Milly, who was standing up with a look of alarm on her fac She can't be going to cry again, she thought, and strolled off int

he front room. Candles were burning on the mantelpiece; they it up the picture of her mother. She glanced at the portrait of er mother. The girl in white seemed to be presiding over the protracted affair of her own deathbed with a smiling ndifference that outraged her daughter.

'You're not going to die – you're not going to die!' said Delia bitterly, looking up at her. Her father, alarmed by the bell, had come into the room. He was wearing a red smoking-cap with an absurd tassel.

But it's all for nothing, Delia said silently, looking at her father. She felt that they must both check their rising excitement. 'Nothing's going to happen – nothing whatever,' she said, ooking at him. But at that moment Eleanor came into the room. She was very white.

'Where's Papa?' she said, looking round. She saw him. 'Come, Papa, come,' she said, stretching out her hand. 'Mama's dying. ... And the children,' she said to Milly over her shoulder.

Two little white patches appeared above her father's ears, Delia noticed. His eyes fixed themselves. He braced himself. He strode past them up the stairs. They all followed in a little procession behind. The dog, Delia noticed, tried to come upstairs with them; but Morris cuffed him back. The Colonel went first into the bedroom; then Eleanor; then Morris; then Martin came down, pulling on a dressing-gown; then Milly brought Rose wrapped in a shawl. But Delia hung back behind the others. There were so many of them in the room that she could get no further than the doorway. She could see two nurses standing with their backs to the wall opposite. One of them was crying – the one, she observed, who had only come that afternoon. She could not see the bed from where she stood. But she could see that Morris had fallen on his knees. Ought I to kneel too? she wondered. Not in the passage, she decided. She looked away; she saw the little window at the end of the passage. Rain was falling; there was a light somewhere that made the raindrops shine. One drop after another slid down the pane; they slid and they paused; one drop joined another drop and then they slid again. There was complete silence in the bedroom.

Is this death? Delia asked herself. For a moment there seemed to be something there. A wall of water seemed to gape apart;

the two walls held themselves apart. She listened. There w complete silence. Then there was a stir, a shuffle of feet in bedroom and out came her father, stumbling.

'Rose!' he cried. 'Rose! Rose!' He held his arms with the fi clenched out in front of him.

You did that very well, Delia told him as he passed her. It w like a scene in a play. She observed quite dispassionately th the raindrops were still falling. One sliding met another a together in one drop they rolled to the bottom of the windo pane.

It was raining. A fine rain, a gentle shower, was peppering t pavements and making them greasy. Was it worth while ope ing an umbrella, was it necessary to hail a hansom, peop coming out from the theatres asked themselves, looking up the mild, milky sky in which the stars were blunted. Where fell on earth, on fields and gardens, it drew up the smell of eart Here a drop poised on a grass-blade; there filled the cup of a wi flower, till the breeze stirred and the rain was spilt. Was worth while to shelter under the hawthorn, under the hedg the sheep seemed to question; and the cows, already turned o in the grey fields, under the dim hedges, marched on, sleepi chewing with raindrops on their hides. Down on the roofs it fe – here in Westminster, there in the Ladbroke Grove; on t wide sea a million points pricked the blue monster like an i numerable shower bath. Over the vast domes, the soaring spir of slumbering University cities, over the leaded libraries, an the museums, now shrouded in brown holland, the gentle ra slid down, till, reaching the mouths of those fantastic laughe the many-clawed gargoyles, it splayed out in a thousand od indentations. A drunken man slipping in a narrow passage ou side the public house, cursed it. Women in childbirth heard th doctor say to the midwife, 'It's raining.' And the wallopin Oxford bells, turning over and over like slow porpoises in a se of oil, contemplatively intoned their musical incantation. Th fine rain, the gentle rain, poured equally over the mitred and th bareheaded with an impartiality which suggested that the go of rain, if there were a god, was thinking Let it not be restricte to the very wise, the very great, but let all breathing kind, th munchers and chewers, the ignorant, the unhappy, those wh toil in the furnace making innumerable copies of the same po

hose who bore red hot minds through contorted letters, and lso Mrs Jones in the alley, share my bounty.

It was raining in Oxford. The rain fell gently, persistently, naking a little chuckling and burbling noise in the gutters. Edward, leaning out of the window, could still see the trees in he college garden, whitened by the falling rain. Save for the ustle of the trees and the rain falling, it was perfectly quiet. A lamp, earthy smell came up from the wet ground. Lamps were eing lit here and there in the dark mass of the college; and here was a pale-yellowish mound in one corner where lamp-ight fell upon a flowering tree. The grass was becoming invisible, luid, grey, like water.

He drew in a long breath of satisfaction. Of all the moments n the day he liked this best, when he stood and looked out into he garden. He breathed in again the cool damp air, and then traightened himself and turned back into the room. He was vorking very hard. His day was parcelled out on the advice of nis tutor into hours and half-hours; but he still had five minutes efore he need begin. He turned up the reading-lamp. It was artly the green light that made him look a little pale and thin, out he was very handsome. With his clear-cut features and the fair hair that he brushed up with a flick of his fingers into a crest, he looked like a Greek boy on a frieze. He smiled. He was thinking as he watched the rain how, after the interview be-tween his father and his tutor – when old Harbottle had said 'Your son has a chance' – the old boy had insisted upon looking up the rooms that his own father had had when his father was at college. They had burst in and found a chap called Thompson on his knees blowing up the fire with a bellows.

'My father had these rooms, sir,' the Colonel had said, by way of apology. The young man had got very red and said, 'Don't mention it.' Edward smiled. 'Don't mention it,' he repeated. It was time to begin. He turned the lamp a little higher. When the lamp was turned higher he saw his work cut out in a sharp circle of bright light from the surrounding dimness. He looked at the textbooks, at the dictionaries lying before him. He always had some doubts before he began. His father would be fright-fully cut-up if he failed. His heart was set on it. He had sent him a dozen of fine old port 'by way of a stirrup-cup,' so he said. But after all Marsham was in for it; then there was the clever little

Jew-boy from Birmingham – but it was time to begin. One aft another the bells of Oxford began pushing their slow chim through the air. They tolled ponderously, unequally, as if th had to roll the air out of their way and the air was heavy. H loved the sound of the bells. He listened till the last stroke ha struck; then pulled his chair to the table; time was up; he mu work now.

A little dint sharpened between his brows. He frowned as h read. He read; and made a note; then he read again. All sounc were blotted out. He saw nothing but the Greek in front of hin But as he read, his brain gradually warmed; he was conscious c something quickening and tightening in his forehead. He caugh phrase after phrase exactly, firmly, more exactly, he notec making a brief note in the margin, than the night before. Littl negligible words now revealed shade of meaning which altere the meaning. He made another note; *that* was the meaning. Hi own dexterity in catching the phrase plumb in the middle gav him a thrill of excitement. There it was, clean and entire. But h must be precise; exact; even his little scribbled notes must b clear as print. He turned to this book; then that book. Then h leant back to see, with his eyes shut. He must let nothin dwindle off into vagueness. The clocks began striking. H listened. The clocks went on striking. The lines that had grave themselves on his face slackened; he leant back; his muscle relaxed; he looked up from his books into the dimness. He fel as if he had thrown himself down on the turf after running race. But for a moment it seemed to him that he was still run ning; his mind went on without the book. It travelled by itsel without impediments through a world of pure meaning; bu gradually it lost its meaning. The books stood out on the wall he saw the cream-coloured panels; a bunch of poppies in a blu vase. The last of the strokes had sounded. He gave a sigh an rose from the table.

He stood by the window again. It was raining, but th whiteness had gone. Save for a wet leaf shining here and there the garden was all dark now – the yellow mound of the flower ing tree had vanished. The college buildings lay round th garden in a low couched mass, here red-stained, here yellow stained, where lights burnt behind curtains; and there lay th chapel, huddling its bulk against the sky which, because of th rain, seemed to tremble slightly. But it was no longer silent. He

istened; there was no sound in particular; but, as he stood looking out, the building hummed with life. There was a sudden roar of laughter; then the tinkle of a piano; then a nondescript clatter and chatter – of china partly; then again the sound of rain falling, and the gutters chuckling and burbling as they sucked up the water. He turned back into the room.

It had grown chilly; the fire was almost out; only a little red glowed under the grey ash. Opportunely he remembered his father's gift – the wine that had come that morning. He went to the side table and poured himself out a glass of port. As he raised it against the light he smiled. He saw again his father's hand with two smooth knobs instead of fingers holding the glass, as he always held the glass, to the light before he drank.

'You can't drive a bayonet through a chap's body in cold blood,' he remembered him saying.

'And you can't go in for an exam without drinking,' said Edward. He hesitated; he held the glass to the light in imitation of his father. Then he sipped. He set the glass on the table in front of him. He turned again to the *Antigone*. He read; then he sipped; then he read; then he sipped again. A soft glow spread over his spine at the nape of his neck. The wine seemed to press open little dividing doors in his brain. And whether it was the wine or the words or both, a luminous shell formed, a purple fume, from which out stepped a Greek girl; yet she was English. There she stood among the marble and the asphodel, yet there she was among the Morris wall-papers and the cabinets – his cousin Kitty, as he had seen her last time he dined at the Lodge. She was both of them – Antigone and Kitty; here in the book; there in the room; lit up, risen, like a purple flower. No, he exclaimed, not in the least like a flower! For if ever a girl held herself upright, lived, laughed and breathed, it was Kitty, in the white and blue dress that she had worn last time he dined at the Lodge. He crossed to the window. Red squares showed through the trees. There was a party at the Lodge. Who was she talking to? What was she saying? He went back to the table.

'Oh, damn!' he exclaimed, prodding the paper with his pencil. The point broke. Then there was a tap at the door, a sliding tap, not a commanding tap, the tap of one who passes, not of one who comes in. He went and opened the door. There on the stair above loomed the figure of a huge young man who was leaning over the banisters. 'Come in,' said Edward.

The huge young man came slowly down the stairs. He w very large. His eyes, which were prominent, became apprehe sive at the sight of the books on the table. He looked at t books on the table. They were Greek. But there was wine aft all.

Edward poured out wine. Beside Gibbs he looked wh Eleanor called 'finicky'. He felt the contrast himself. The han with which he lifted his glass was like a girl's beside Gibbs great red paw. Gibbs's hand was burnt bright scarlet; it was lil a piece of raw meat.

Hunting was the subject they had in common. They talk about hunting. Edward leant back and let Gibbs do the talkin It was all very pleasant, listening to Gibbs, riding through the English lanes. He was talking about cubbing in September; and raw but handy hack. He was saying, 'You remember that far on the right as you go up to Stapleys? and the pretty girl?' – I winked – 'worse luck, she's married to a keeper.' He was sayin – Edward watched him gulping down his port – how he wish this damned summer were over. Then, again, he was telling t old story about the spaniel bitch. 'You'll come and stop with in September,' he was saying when the door opened so silent that Gibbs did not hear it, and in glided another man – qui another man.

It was Ashley who came in. He was the very opposite of Gibb He was neither tall nor short, neither dark nor fair. But he w not negligible – far from it. It was partly the way he moved, if chair and table rayed out some influence which he could fe by means of some invisible antennae, or whiskers, like a ca Now he sank down, cautiously, gingerly, and looked at the tab and half read a line in a book. Gibbs stopped in the middle of h sentence.

'Hullo, Ashley,' he said rather curtly. He stretched out an poured himself another glass of the Colonel's port. Now th decanter was empty.

'Sorry,' he said, glancing at Ashley.

'Don't open another bottle for me,' said Ashley quickly. H voice sounded a little squeaky, as if he were ill at ease.

'Oh, but we shall want some more too,' said Edward casuall He went into the dining-room to fetch it.

'Damned awkward,' he reflected as he stooped among th bottles. It meant, he reflected grimly as he chose his bottl

another row with Ashley, and he had had two rows with Ashley about Gibbs already this term.

He went back with the bottle and sat down on a low stool between them. He uncorked the wine and poured it out. They both looked at him, as he sat between them, admiringly. The vanity, which Eleanor always laughed at in her brother, was flattered. He liked to feel their eyes on him. And yet he was at his ease with both of them, he thought; the thought pleased him; he could talk hunting with Gibbs and books with Ashley. But Ashley could only talk about books, and Gibbs – he smiled – could only talk about girls. Girls and horses. He poured out three glasses of wine.

Ashley sipped gingerly, and Gibbs, with his great red hands on the glass, gulped rather. They talked about races; then they talked about examinations. Then Ashley, glancing at the books on the table, said:

'And what about you?'

'I've not the ghost of a chance,' said Edward. His indifference was affected. He pretended to despise examinations; but it was pretence. Gibbs was taken in by him; but Ashley saw through him. He often caught Edward out in small vanities like this; but they only served to endear him the more. How beautiful he looks, he was thinking: there he sat between them with the light falling on the top of his fair hair; like a Greek boy; strong; yet in some way, weak, needing his protection.

He ought to be rescued from brutes like Gibbs, he thought savagely. For how Edward could tolerate that clumsy brute, he thought looking at him, who always seemed to smell of beer and horses (he was listening to him) Ashley could not conceive. As he came in he had caught the tail of an infuriating sentence – of a sentence that seemed to show that they had made some plan together.

'Well, then, I'll see Storey about that hack,' Gibbs was saying now, as if he were finishing some private talk that they had been having before he came in. A spasm of jealousy ran through Ashley. To hide it, he stretched out his hand and took up a book that lay open on the table. He pretended to read it.

He did it to insult him, Gibbs felt. Ashley, he knew, thought him a great hulking brute; the dirty little swine came in, spoilt the talk, and then began to give himself airs at Gibbs's expense. Very well; he had been going to go; now he would stay; he

would twist his tail for him – he knew how. He turned
Edward and went on talking.

'You won't mind pigging it,' he said. 'My people will be up
Scotland.'

Ashley turned a page viciously. They would be alone the
Edward began to relish the situation; he played up to
maliciously.

'All right,' he said. 'But you'll have to see I don't make a fo
of myself,' he added.

'Oh, it'll only be cubbing,' said Gibbs. Ashley turned anoth
page. Edward glanced at the book. It was being held upsi
down. But as he glanced at Ashley he caught his head again
the panels and the poppies. How civilized he looked, he though
compared with Gibbs; and how ironical. He respected him ir
mensely. Gibbs had lost his glamour. There he was, telling t
same old story of the spaniel bitch all over again. There wou
be a devil's own row tomorrow, he thought, and glanced su
reptitiously at his watch. It was past eleven; and he must do a
hour's work before breakfast. He swallowed down the last dro
of his wine, stretched himself, yawned ostentatiously and rose

'I'm off to bed,' he said. Ashley looked at him appealingl
Edward could torture him horribly. Edward began unbuttonir
his waistcoat; he had a perfect figure, Ashley thought, lookir
at him, standing between them.

'But don't you hurry,' said Edward, yawning again. 'Finis
your drinks.' He smiled at the thought of Ashley and Gibbs fin
shing their drinks together.

'There's plenty more in there if you want it.' He indicated th
next room and left them.

'Let 'em fight it out together,' he thought as he shut the be
room door. His own fight would come soon enough; he kne
that from the look on Ashley's face. He was infernally jealou
He began to undress. He put his money methodically in tw
heaps on either side of the looking-glass, for he was a little nea
about money; folded his waistcoat carefully on a chair; the
glanced at himself in the looking-glass, and brushed his crest u
with the half-conscious gesture that irritated his sister. Then h
listened.

A door slammed outside. One of them had gone – either Gibb
or Ashley. But one, he rather thought, was still there. H
listened intently. He heard someone moving about in the sittin

room. Very quickly, very firmly, he turned the key in the door. moment later the handle moved.

'Edward!' said Ashley. His voice was low and controlled.

Edward made no answer.

'Edward!' said Ashley, rattling the handle.

The voice was sharp and appealing.

'Good-night,' said Edward sharply. He listened. There was a pause. Then he heard the door shut. Ashley was gone.

'Lord! What a row there'll be tomorrow,' said Edward, going to the window and looking out at the rain that was still falling.

The party at the Lodge was over. The ladies stood in the doorway in their flowing gowns, and looked up at the sky from which a gentle rain was falling.

'Is that a nightingale?' said Mrs Larpent, hearing a bird twitter in the bushes. Then old Chuffy – the great Dr Andrews – standing slightly behind her with his domed head exposed to the drizzle and his hirsute, powerful but not prepossessing countenance turned upward, gave a roar of laughter. It was a thrush, he said. The laughter was echoed back like a hyena laughing from the stone walls. Then, with a wave of the hand dictated by centuries of tradition, Mrs Larpent drew back her foot, as if she had encroached upon one of the chalk marks which decorate academic lintels and, signifying that Mrs Lathom, wife of the Divinity professor, should precede her, they passed out into the rain.

In the long drawing-room at the Lodge they were all standing up.

'I'm so glad Chuffy – Dr Andrews – came up to your expectations,' Mrs Malone was saying in her courteous manner. As residents they called the great Doctor 'Chuffy'; he was Dr Andrews to American visitors.

The other guests had gone. But the Howard Fripps, the Americans, were staying in the house. Mrs Howard Fripp was saying that Dr Andrews had been perfectly charming to her. And her husband, the Professor, was saying something equally polite to the Master. Kitty, the daughter, standing a little in the background, wished that they would get it over and come to bed. But she had to stand there until her mother gave the signal for them to move.

'Yes, I never knew Chuffy in better form,' her father co
tinued, implying a compliment to the little American lady wh
had made such a conquest. She was small and vivacious, an
Chuffy liked ladies to be small and vivacious.

'I adore his books,' she said in her queer nasal voice. 'But
never expected to have the pleasure of sitting next him a
dinner.'

Did you really like the way he spits when he talks? Kitt
wondered, looking at her. She was extraordinarily pretty an
gay. All the other women had looked dowdy and dumpy besid
her, except her mother. For Mrs Malone, standing by the fire
place with her foot on the fender, with her crisp white hai
curled stiffly, never looked in the fashion or out of it. Mrs Fripp
on the contrary, looked in the fashion.

And yet they laughed at her, Kitty thought. She had caugh
the Oxford ladies lifting their eyebrows at some of Mrs Fripp'
American phrases. But Kitty liked her American phrases; the
were so different from what she was used to. She was America
a real American; but nobody would have taken her husband fo
an American, Kitty thought, looking at him. He might hav
been any professor, from any University, she thought, with hi
distinguished wrinkled face, his goatee beard and the blac
ribbon of his eyeglass crossing his shirt-front as if it were som
foreign order. He spoke without any accent – at least withou
any American accent. Yet he too was different somehow. Sh
had dropped her handkerchief. He stooped at once and gave i
her with a bow that was almost too courteous – it made her shy
She bent her head and smiled at the Professor, rather shyly, a
she took the handkerchief.

'Thank you so much,' she said. He made her feel awkward
Beside Mrs Fripp she felt even larger than usual. Her hair, of th
true Rigby red, never lay smooth as it should have done; Mr
Fripp's hair looked beautiful, glossy and tidy.

But now Mrs Malone, glancing at Mrs Fripp, said, 'Well
ladies—?' and waved her hand.

There was something authoritative about her action – as if sh
had done it again and again; and been obeyed again and again
They moved towards the door. Tonight there was a little cere
mony at the door; Professor Fripp bent very low over Mr
Malone's hand, not quite so low over Kitty's hand, and held th
door wide open for them.

'He rather overdoes it,' Kitty thought to herself as they passed out.

The ladies took their candles and went in single file up the wide low stairs. Portraits of former masters of Katharine's looked down on them as they mounted. The light of the candles flickered over the dark gold-framed faces as they went up stair after stair.

Now she'll stop, thought Kitty, following behind, and ask who *that* is.

But Mrs Fripp did not stop. Kitty gave her good marks for that. She compared favourably with most of their visitors, Kitty thought. She had never done the Bodleian quite so quick as she had done it that morning. Indeed, she had felt rather guilty. There were a great many more sights to be seen, had they wished it. But in less than an hour of it Mrs Fripp had turned to Kitty and had said in her fascinating, if nasal, voice:

'Well, my dear, I guess you're a bit fed-up with sights – what d'you say to an ice in that dear old bun-shop with the bow windows?'

And they had eaten ices when they ought to have been going round the Bodleian.

The procession had now reached the first landing, and Mrs Malone stopped at the door of the famous room where distinguished guests always slept when they stayed at the Lodge. She gave one look round as she held the door open.

'The bed where Queen Elizabeth did *not* sleep,' she said, making the usual little joke as they looked at the great four-poster. The fire was burning; the water-jug was swaddled up like an old woman with the toothache; and the candles were lit on the dressing-table. But there was something strange about the room tonight, Kitty thought, glancing over her mother's shoulder; a dressing-gown flashed green and silver upon the bed. And on the dressing-table there were a number of little pots and jars and a large powder-puff stained pink. Could it be, was it possible, that the reason why Mrs Fripp looked so very bright and the Oxford ladies looked so very dingy was that Mrs Fripp— But Mrs Malone was saying, 'You have everything you want?' with such extreme politeness that Kitty guessed that Mrs Malone too had seen the dressing-table. Kitty held out her hand. To her surprise, instead of taking it, Mrs Fripp pulled her down and kissed her.

‘Thanks a thousand times for showing me all those sights,’ sl said. ‘And remember, you’re coming to stay with us in Ar erica,’ she added. For she had liked the big shy girl who had s obviously preferred eating ices to showing her the Bodleian; ar she had felt sorry for her too for some reason.

‘Good-night, Kitty,’ said her mother as she shut the door; ar they touched each other perfunctorily on the cheek.

Kitty went on upstairs to her own room. She still felt the spo where Mrs Fripp had kissed her; the kiss had left a little glow o her cheek.

She shut the door. The room was very stuffy. It was a warr night, but they always shut the windows and drew the curtain: She opened the windows and drew the curtains. It was raining a usual. Arrows of silver rain crossed the dark trees in the garder Then she kicked off her shoes. That was the worst of being s large – shoes were always too tight; white satin shoes in par ticular. Then she began to unhook her dress. It was difficult there were so many hooks and all at the back; but at last th white satin dress was off and laid neatly across the chair; an then she began to brush her hair. It had been Thursday at it very worst, she reflected; sights in the morning; people fo lunch; undergraduates for tea; and a dinner-party in the even ing.

However, she concluded, tugging the comb through her hair it’s over . . . it’s over.

The candles flickered and then the muslin blind, blowing ou in a white balloon, almost touched the flame. She opened he eyes with a start. She was standing at the open window with a light beside her in her petticoat.

‘Anybody might see in,’ her mother had said, scolding her only the other day.

Now, she said, moving the candles to a table at the right nobody can see in.

She began to brush her hair again. But with the light at the side instead of in front she saw her face from a different angle.

Am I pretty? she asked herself, putting down her comb and looking in the glass. Her cheek-bones were too prominent; her eyes were set too far apart. She was not pretty; no, her size was against her. What did Mrs Fripp think of me, she wondered?

She kissed me, she suddenly remembered with a start of pleasure, feeling again the glow on her cheek. She asked me to go with them in America. What fun that would be! she thought. What fun to leave Oxford and go to America! She tugged the comb through her hair, which was like a fuzz bush.

But the bells were making their usual commotion. She hated the sound of the bells; it always seemed to her a dismal sound; and then, just as one stopped, here was another beginning. They went walloping one over another, one after another, as if they would never be finished. She counted eleven, twelve, and then they went on thirteen, fourteen ... clock repeating clock through the damp, drizzling air. It was late. She began to brush her teeth. She glanced at the calendar above the washstand and tore off Thursday and screwed it into a ball, as if she were saying 'That's over! That's over!' Friday in large red letters confronted her. Friday was a good day; on Friday she had her lesson with Lucy; she was going to tea with the Robsons. 'Blessed is he who has found his work' she read on the calendar. Calendars always seemed to be talking at you. She had not done her work. She glanced at a row of blue volumes, *The Constitutional History of England*, by Dr Andrews. There was a paper slip in volume three. She should have finished her chapter for Lucy; but not tonight. She was too tired tonight. She turned to the window. A roar of laughter floated out from the undergraduates' quarters. What are they laughing at, she wondered as she stood by the window. It sounded as if they were enjoying themselves. They never laugh like that when they come to tea at the Lodge, she thought, as the laughter died away. The little man from Balliol sat twisting his fingers, twisting his fingers. He would not talk; but he would not go. Then she blew out the candle and got into bed. I rather like him, she thought, stretching out in the cool sheets, though he twists his fingers. As for Tony Ashton, she thought, turning on her pillow, I don't like him. He always seemed to be cross-examining her about Edward, whom Eleanor, she thought, calls 'Nigs'. His eyes were too close together. A bit of a barber's block, she thought. He had followed her at the picnic the other day – the picnic when the ant got into Mrs Lathom's skirts. There he was always beside her. But she didn't want to marry him. She didn't want to be a Don's wife and live in Oxford for ever. No, no, no! She yawned, turned on her pillow, and listening to a belated bell that went

walloping like a slow porpoise through the thick drizzling a
yawned once more and fell asleep.

The rain fell steadily all night long, making a faint mist ov
the fields, chuckling and burbling in the gutters. In gardens
fell over flowering bushes of lilac and laburnum. It slipp
gently over the leaden domes of libraries, and splayed out of t
laughing mouths of gargoyles. It smeared the window whe
the Jew boy from Birmingham sat mugging up Greek with
wet towel round his head; where Dr Malone sat up late writi
another chapter in his monumental history of the college. A
in the garden of the Lodge outside Kitty's window it sluiced t
ancient tree under which Kings and poets had sat drinking thr
centuries ago, but now it was half fallen and had to be propp
up by a stake in the middle.

'Umbrella, Miss?' said Hiscock, offering Kitty an umbrella
she left the house rather later than she should have left it t
following afternoon. There was a chilliness in the air whic
made her glad, as she caught sight of a party with white a
yellow frocks and cushions bound for the river, that she w
not going to sit in a boat today. No parties today, she though
no parties today. But she was late, the clock warned her.

She strode along until she came to the cheap red villas th
her father disliked so much that he would always make a rou
to avoid them. But as it was in one of these cheap red villas th
Miss Craddock lived, Kitty saw them haloed with romance. H
heart beat faster as she turned the corner by the new chapel a
saw the steep steps of the house where Miss Craddock actual
lived. Lucy went up those steps and down them every day; th
was her window; this was her bell. The bell came out with
jerk when she pulled it; but it did not go back again, for ever
thing was ramshackle in Lucy's house; but everything w
romantic. There was Lucy's umbrella in the stand; and it t
was not like other umbrellas; it had a parrot's head for a handl
But as she went up the steep shiny stairs excitement becam
mixed with fear: once more she had scamped her work; she h
not 'given her mind to it' again this week.

'She's coming!' thought Miss Craddock, holding her pen su
pended. Her nose was red-tipped; there was something owl-lik

about the eyes, round which there was a sallow, hollow depression. There was the bell. The pen had been dipped in red ink; she had been correcting Kitty's essay. Now she heard her step on the stairs. 'She's coming!' she thought with a little catch of her breath, laying down the pen.

'I'm awfully sorry, Miss Craddock,' Kitty said, taking off her things and sitting down at the table. 'But we had people staying in the house.'

Miss Craddock brushed her hand over her mouth in a way she had when she was disappointed.

'I see,' she said. 'So you haven't done any work this week either.'

Miss Craddock took up her pen and dipped it in the red ink. Then she turned to the essay.

'It wasn't worth correcting,' she remarked, pausing with her pen in the air.

'A child of ten would have been ashamed of it.' Kitty blushed bright red.

'And the odd thing is,' said Miss Craddock putting down her pen when the lesson was over, 'that you've got quite an original mind.'

Kitty flushed bright red with pleasure.

'But you don't use it,' said Miss Craddock. 'Why don't you use it?' she added, looking at her out of her fine grey eyes.

'You see, Miss Craddock,' Kitty began eagerly, 'my mother—'

'Hm ... hm ... hm ...' Miss Craddock stopped her. Confidences were not what Dr Malone paid her for. She got up.

'Look at my flowers,' she said, feeling that she had snubbed her too severely. There was a bowl of flowers on the table; wild flowers, blue and white, stuck into a cushion of wet green moss.

'My sister sent them from the moors,' she said.

'The moors?' said Kitty. 'Which moors?' She stooped and touched the little flowers tenderly. How lovely she is, Miss Craddock thought; for she was sentimental about Kitty. But I will not be sentimental, she told herself.

'The Scarborough moors,' she said aloud. 'If you keep the moss damp but not too damp, they'll last for weeks,' she added looking at the flowers.

'Damp, but not too damp,' Kitty smiled. 'That's easy in Oxford, I should think. It's always raining here.' She looked at the window. Mild rain was falling.

'If I lived up there, Miss Craddock—' she began, taking h umbrella. But she stopped. The lesson was over.

'You'd find it very dull,' said Miss Craddock, looking at he She was putting on her cloak. Certainly she looked very lovel putting on her cloak.

'When I was your age,' Miss Craddock continued, remer bering her role as teacher, 'I would have given my eyes to hav the opportunities you have, to meet the people you meet; t know the people you know.'

'Old Chuffy?' said Kitty, remembering Miss Craddock's pr found admiration for that light of learning.

'You irreverent girl!' Miss Craddock expostulated. 'The grea est historian of his age!'

'Well, he doesn't talk history to me,' said Kitty, rememberin the damp feel of a heavy hand on her knee.

She hesitated; but the lesson was over; another pupil wa coming. She glanced round the room. There was a plate c oranges on the top of a pile of shiny exercise-books: a box tha looked as if it contained biscuits. Was this her only room, sh wondered? Did she sleep on the lumpy-looking sofa with th shawl thrown over it? There was no looking-glass, and she stuc her hat on rather to one side, thinking as she did so that Mis Craddock despised clothes.

But Miss Craddock was thinking how wonderful it was to b young and lovely and to meet brilliant men.

'I'm going to tea with the Robsons,' said Kitty, holding out he hand. The girl, Nelly Robson, was Miss Craddock's favourit pupil; the only girl, she used to say, who knew what wor meant.

'Are you walking?' said Miss Craddock, looking at her clothes 'It's some way, you know. Down Ringmer Road, past the gas works.'

'Yes, I'm walking,' said Kitty, shaking hands.

'And I will try to work hard this week,' she said, looking dow on her with eyes full of love and admiration. Then she de scended the steep stairs whose oil-cloth shone bright wit romance; and glanced at the umbrella that had a parrot for a handle.

The son of the Professor, who had done it all off his own bat 'a most creditable performance', to quote Dr Malone, was men

ding the hencoops in the back garden at Prestwich Terrace – a scratched up little place. Hammer, hammer, hammer, he went, fixing a board to the rotten roof. His hands were white, unlike his father's, and long fingered too. He had no love of doing these jobs himself. But his father mended the boots on Sunday. Down came the hammer. He went at it, hammering the long shiny nails that sometimes split the wood, or drove outside. For it was rotten. He hated hens too, imbecile fowls, a huddle of feathers, watching him out of their red beady eyes. They scratched up the path; left little curls of feather here and there on the beds, which were more to his fancy. But nothing grew there. How grow flowers like other people if one kept hens? A bell rang.

'Curse it! There's some old woman come to tea,' he said, holding his hammer suspended; and then brought it down on the nail.

As she stood on the step, noting the cheap lace curtains and the blue and orange glass, Kitty tried to remember what it was that her father had said about Nelly's father. But a little maid let her in. I'm much too large, Kitty thought, as she stood for a moment in the room to which the maid had admitted her. It was a small room, crowded with objects. And I'm too well dressed she thought, looking at herself in the glass over the fireplace. But here her friend Nelly came in. She was dumpy; over her large grey eyes she wore steel spectacles, and her brown holland overall seemed to increase her air of uncompromising veracity.

'We're having tea in the back room,' she said, looking her up and down. What has she been doing? Why is she dressed in an overall? Kitty thought, following her into the room where tea had already begun.

'Pleased to see you,' said Mrs Robson formally, looking over her shoulder. But nobody seemed in the least pleased to see her. Two children were already eating. Slices of bread and butter were in their hands, but they stayed the bread and butter and stared at Kitty as she sat down.

She seemed to see the whole room at once. It was bare yet crowded. The table was too large; there were hard green-plush chairs; yet the table-cloth was coarse; darned in the middle; and the china was cheap with its florid red roses. The light was extraordinarily bright in her eyes. A sound of hammering came in from the garden outside. She looked at the garden; it was a

scratched-up, earthy garden without flower-beds; and there w a shed at the end of the garden from which the sound of ha mering came.

They're all so short too, Kitty thought, glancing at M Robson. Only her shoulders came above the tea things; but h shoulders were substantial. She was a little like Bigge, the cook the Lodge, but more formidable. She gave one brief look at M Robson and then began to pull off her gloves secretly, swiftl under the cover of the table-cloth. But why does nobody tal she thought nervously. The children kept their eyes fixed upo her with a look of solemn amazement. Their owl-like stare we up and down over her uncompromisingly. Happily before the could express their disapproval, Mrs Robson told them sharpl to go on with their tea; and the bread and butter slowly rose t their mouths again.

Why don't they say something? Kitty thought again, glancin at Nelly. She was about to speak when an umbrella grated in th hall; and Mrs Robson looked up and said to her daughter:

'There's Dad!'

Next moment in trotted a little man, who was so short that h looked as if his jacket should have been an Eton jacket, and hi collar a round collar. He wore, too, a very thick watch-chain made of silver, like a schoolboy's. But his eyes were keen an fierce, his moustache bristly, and he spoke with a curiou accent.

'Pleased to see you,' he said, and gripped her hand hard in his He sat down, tucked a napkin under his chin so that it obscure his heavy silver watch-chain under its stiff white shield Hammer, hammer, hammer came from the shed in the garden.

'Tell Jo tea's on the table,' said Mrs Robson to Nelly, who ha brought in a dish with a cover on it. The cover was removed Actually they were going to eat fried fish and potatoes at tea time, Kitty remarked.

But Mr Robson had turned his rather alarming blue eyes upon her. She expected him to say, 'How is your father, Miss Malone?

But he said:

'You're reading history with Lucy Craddock?'

'Yes,' she said. She liked the way he said Lucy Craddock, as i he respected her. So many of the Dons sneered at her. She liked feeling too, as he made her feel, that she was nobody's daughter in particular.

'You're interested in history?' he said, applying himself to his fish and potatoes.

'I love it,' she said. His bright blue eyes, gazing straight at her rather fiercely, seemed to make her say quite shortly what she meant.

'But I'm frightfully lazy,' she added. Here Mrs Robson looked at her rather sternly, and handed her a thick slice of bread on the point of a knife.

Anyhow their taste is awful, she said by way of revenge for the snub that she felt was intended. She focussed her eyes on a picture opposite – an oily landscape in a heavy gilt frame. There was a blue and red Japanese plate on either side of it. Everything was ugly, especially the pictures.

'The moor at the back of our house,' said Mr Robson, seeing her look at a picture.

It struck Kitty that the accent with which he spoke was a Yorkshire accent. In looking at the picture he had increased his accent.

'In Yorkshire?' she said. 'We come from there too. My mother's family I mean,' she added.

'Your mother's family?' said Mr Robson.

'Rigby,' she said, and blushed slightly.

'Rigby?' said Mrs Robson, looking up.

'I wur-r-rked for a Miss Rigby before I married.'

What sort of wur-r-rk had Mrs Robson done? Kitty wondered. Sam explained.

'My wife was a cook, Miss Malone, before we married,' he said. Again he increased his accent as if he were proud of it. I had a great-uncle who rode in a circus, she felt inclined to say: and an Aunt who married . . . but here Mrs Robson interrupted her.

'The Hollies,' she said. 'Two very old ladies; Miss Ann and Miss Matilda.' She spoke more gently.

'But they must be dead long ago,' she concluded. For the first time she leant back in her chair and stirred her tea, just as old Snap at the farm, Kitty thought, stirred her tea round and round and round.

'Tell Jo we're not sparing the cake,' said Mr Robson, cutting himself a slice of that craggy-looking object; and Nell went out of the room once more. The hammering stopped in the garden. The door opened. Kitty, who had altered the focus of her eyes to

suit the smallness of the Robson family, was taken by surpri The young man seemed immense in that little room. He was handsome young man. He brushed his hand through his hair he came in, for a wood shaving had stuck in it.

'Our Jo,' said Mrs Robson, introducing them. 'Go and get t kettle, Jo,' she added; and he went at once as if he were used t it. When he came back with the kettle, Sam began chaffing hi about a hencoop.

'It takes you a long time, my son, to mend a hencoop,' h said. There was some family joke which Kitty could not follo about mending boots and hencoops. She watched him eatin steadily under his father's banter. He was not Eton or Harrow or Rugby or Winchester; or reading or rowing. He reminded he of Alf, the farm hand up at Carter's, who had kissed her unde the shadow of the haystack when she was fifteen, and ol Carter loomed up leading a bull with a ring through its nose anc said 'Stop that!' She looked down again. She would rather like Jo to kiss her; better than Edward, she thought to herself suddenly She remembered her own appearance, which she had forgotten She liked him. Yes, she liked them all very much, she told her self; very much indeed. She felt as if she had given her nurse the slip and run off on her own.

Then the children began scrambling down off their chairs; the meal was over. She began to fish under the table for her gloves.

'These them?' said Jo, picking them up off the floor. She took them and crumpled them up in her hand.

He cast one quick sulky look at her as she stood in the door-way. She's a stunner, he said to himself, but my word, she gives herself airs!

Mrs Robson ushered her into the little room where, before tea, she had looked in the glass. It was crowded with objects. There were bamboo tables; velvet books with brass hinges; marble gladiators askew on the mantelpiece and innumerable pictures. . . . But Mrs Robson, with a gesture that was exactly like Mrs Malone's when she pointed to the Gainsborough that was not quite certainly a Gainsborough, was displaying a huge silver salver with an inscription.

'The salver my husband's pupils gave him,' Mrs Robson began, pointing to the inscription. Kitty began to spell out the inscrip-tion.

'And this . . .' said Mrs Robson, when she had done, pointing to a document framed like a text on the wall.

But here Sam, who stood in the background fiddling with his watch-chain, stepped forward and indicated with his stubby forefinger the picture of an old woman looking rather over life size in the photographer's chair.

'My mother,' he said and stopped. He gave a queer little chuckle.

'Your mother?' Kitty repeated, stooping to look. The unwieldy old lady, posed in all the stiffness of her best clothes, was plain in the extreme. And yet Kitty felt that admiration was expected.

'You're very like her, Mr Robson,' was all she could find to say. Indeed they had something of the same sturdy look; the same piercing eyes; and they were both very plain. He gave an odd little chuckle.

'Glad you think so,' he said. 'Brought us all up. Not one of them a patch on her though.' He gave his odd little chuckle again.

Then he turned to his daughter, who had come in and was standing there in her overall.

'Not a patch on her,' he repeated, pinching Nell on the shoulder. As she stood there with her father's hand on her shoulder under the portrait of her grandmother, a sudden rush of self-pity came over Kitty. If she had been the daughter of people like the Robsons, she thought; if she had lived in the north – but it was clear they wanted her to go. Nobody ever sat down in this room. They were all standing up. Nobody pressed her to stay. When she said that she must go, they all came out into the little hall with her. They were all about to go on with what they were doing, she felt. Nell was about to go into the kitchen and wash up the tea things; Jo was about to return to his hencoops; the children were about to be put to bed by their mother; and Sam – what was he about to do? She looked at him standing there with his heavy watch-chain, like a schoolboy's. You are the nicest man I have ever met, she thought, holding out her hand.

'Pleased to have made your acquaintance,' said Mrs Robson in her stately way.

'Hope you'll come again soon,' said Mr Robson, grasping her hand very hard.

'Oh, I should love to!' she exclaimed, pressing their hands hard as she could. Did they know how much she admired the she wanted to say. Would they accept her in spite of her l and her gloves? she wanted to ask. But they were all going off their work. And I am going home to dress for dinner, s thought as she walked down the little front steps, pressing h pale kid gloves in her hands.

The sun was shining again; the damp pavements gleamed; gust of wind tossed up the wet branches of the almond trees the villa gardens; little twigs and tufts of blossom whirled on the pavement and stuck there. As she stood still for a second a crossing she too seemed to be tossed aloft out of her usu surroundings. She forgot where she was. The sky, blown into blue open space, seemed to be looking down not here upo streets and houses, but upon open country, where the win brushed the moors, and sheep, with grey fleeces ruffled, she tered under stone walls. She could almost see the moo brighten and darken as the clouds passed over them.

But then in two strides the unfamiliar street became th street she had always known. Here she was again in the pave alley; there were the old curiosity shops with their blue chin and their brass warming-pans; and next moment she was out i the famous crooked street with all the domes and steeples. Th sun lay in broad stripes across it. There were the cabs and th awnings and the book-shops; the old men in black gowns billow ing; the young women in pink and blue dresses flowing; and th young men in straw hats carrying cushions under their arm But for a moment all seemed to her obsolete, frivolous, inan The usual undergraduate in cap and gown with books under h arm looked silly. And the portentous old men with their exa gerated features, looked like gargoyles, carved, mediaeva unreal. They were all like people dressed up and acting part she thought. Now she stood at her own door and waited fo Hiscock, the butler, to take his feet off the fender and waddl upstairs. Why can't you talk like a human-being? she though as he took her umbrella and mumbled his usual remark abou the weather.

Slowly, as if a weight had got into her feet too, she wen upstairs, seeing through open windows and open doors th

smooth lawn, the recumbent tree and the faded chintzes. Down she sank on the edge of her bed. It was very stuffy. A bluebottle buzzed round and round; a lawn mower squeaked in the garden below. Far away pigeons were cooing – Take two coos, Taffy. Take two coos. Tak. . . . Her eyes half shut. It seemed to her that she was sitting on the terrace of an Italian inn. There was her father pressing gentians on to a rough sheet of blotting paper. The lake below lapped and dazzled. She plucked up courage and said to her father: 'Father . . .' He looked up very kindly over his spectacles. He held the little blue flower between his thumb and finger. 'I want . . .' she began slipping off the balustrade upon which she was sitting. But here a bell struck. She rose and crossed to the washing-table. What would Nell think of this, she thought, tilting up the beautifully polished brass jug and dipping her hands in the hot water. Another bell tolled. She crossed to the dressing-table. The air from the garden outside was full of murmurings and cooings. Wood shavings, she said as she took up her brush and comb – he had wood shavings in his hair. A servant passed with a pile of tin dishes on his head. The pigeons were cooing. Take two coos, Taffy. Take two coos. . . . But there was the dinner bell. In a moment she had pinned her hair up, hooked her dress on, and ran down the slippery stairs, sliding her palm along the banisters as she used to do when she was a child in a hurry. And there they all were.

Her parents were standing in the hall. A tall man was with them. His gown was thrown back and one last ray of sunshine lit up his genial, authoritative face. Who was he? Kitty could not remember.

'My word!' he exclaimed, looking up at her with admiration.

'It *is* Kitty, isn't it?' he said. Then he took her hand and pressed it.

'How you've grown!' he exclaimed. He looked at her as if he were looking not at her but at his own past.

'You don't remember me?' he added.

'Chingachgook!' she exclaimed, recalling some childish memory.

'But he is now Sir Richard Norton,' said her mother, giving him a proud little pat on the shoulder; and they turned away, for the gentlemen were dining in Hall.

It was dull fish, Kitty thought; the plates were half col
was stale bread she thought, cut in meagre little squares;
colour, the gaiety of Prestwich Terrace was still in her eye
her ears. She granted, as she looked round, the superiority o
Lodge china and silver; and the Japanese plates and the pic
had been hideous; but this dining-room with its han
creepers and its vast cracked canvases was so dark. At Prestw
Terrace the room was full of light; the sound of hamm
hammer, hammer still rang in her ears. She looked out at
fading greens in the garden. For the thousandth time she ech
her childish wish that the tree would either lie down or st
up instead of doing neither. It was not actually raining.
gusts of whiteness seemed to blow about the garden as the w
stirred the thick leaves on the laurels.

'Didn't you notice it?' Mrs Malone suddenly appealed
her.

'What, Mama?' Kitty asked. She had not been attending.

'The odd taste in the fish,' said her mother.

'I don't think I did,' she said; and Mrs Malone went on talk
to the butler. The plates were changed; another dish
brought in. But Kitty was not hungry. She bit one of
green sweets that were provided for her, and then the mod
dinner, retrieved for the ladies from the relics of last nig
party, was over and she followed her mother into the drawi
room.

It was too big when they were alone, but they always
there. The pictures seemed to be looking down at the em
chairs, and the empty chairs seemed to be looking up at
pictures. The old gentleman who had ruled the college ove
hundred years ago seemed to vanish in the daytime.
he came back when the lamps were lit. The face was pla
solid and smiling, and singularly like Dr Malone, who,
a frame been set round him, might have hung over the firepl
too.

'It's nice to have a quiet evening once in a way,' Mrs Mal
was saying, 'though the Fripps . . .' Her voice tailed off as she
on her spectacles and took up *The Times*. This was her mom
of relaxation and recuperation after the day's work. She s
pressed a little yawn as she glanced up and down the colum
of the newspaper.

'What a charming man he was,' she observed casually, as s

looked at the births and deaths. 'One would hardly have taken him for an American.'

Kitty recalled her thoughts. She was thinking of the Robsons. Her mother was talking about the Fripps.

'And I liked her too,' she said rashly. 'Wasn't she lovely?'

'Hum – m – m. A little overdressed for my taste,' said Mrs Malone dryly. 'And that accent—' she went on, looking through the paper, 'I sometimes hardly understood what she said.'

Kitty was silent. Here they differed; as they did about so many things.

Suddenly Mrs Malone looked up:

'Yes, just what I was saying to Bigge this morning,' she said, laying down the paper.

'What, Mama?' said Kitty.

'This man – in the leading article,' said Mrs Malone. She touched it with her finger.

' "With the best flesh, fish and fowl in the world," ' she read, ' "we shall not be able to turn them to account because we have none to cook them" – what I was saying to Bigge this morning.' She gave her quick little sigh. Just when one wanted to impress people, like those Americans, something went wrong. It had been the fish this time. She foraged for her work things, and Kitty took up the paper.

'It's the leading article,' said Mrs Malone. That man almost always said the very thing that she was thinking, which comforted her, and gave her a sense of security in a world which seemed to her to be changing for the worse.

' "Before the rigid and now universal enforcement of school attendance . . .?" ' Kitty read out.

'Yes. That's it,' said Mrs Malone, opening her work-box and looking for her scissors.

' ". . . the children saw a good deal of cooking which, poor as it was, yet gave them some taste and inkling of knowledge. They now see nothing and they do nothing but read, write, sum, sew or knit," ' Kitty read out.

'Yes, yes,' said Mrs Malone. She unrolled the long strip of embroidery upon which she was working a design of birds pecking at fruit copied from a tomb at Ravenna. It was for the spare bedroom.

The leading article bored Kitty with its pompous fluency. She

searched the paper for some little piece of news that mi interest her mother. Mrs Malone liked someone to talk to her read aloud to her as she worked. Night after night her embro ery served to weave the after-dinner talk into a pleasant h mony. One said something and stitched; looked at the desi chose another coloured silk, and stitched again. Sometimes Malone read poetry aloud – Pope: Tennyson. Tonight she wou have liked Kitty to talk to her. But she was becoming increasi ly conscious of difficulty with Kitty. Why? She glanced her. What was wrong? she wondered. She gave her quick lit sigh.

Kitty turned over the large pages. Sheep had the fluke; Tur wanted religious liberty; there was the General Election.

'Mr Gladstone—' she began.

Mrs Malone had lost her scissors. It annoyed her.

'Who can have taken them again?' she began. Kitty we down on the floor to look for them. Mrs Malone ferreted in t work-box; then she plunged her hand into the fissure betwe the cushion and the chair frame and brought up not only t scissors but also a little mother-of-pearl paper-knife that h been missing for ever so long. The discovery annoyed her. proved Ellen never shook up the cushions properly.

'Here they are, Kitty,' she said. They were silent. There w always some constraint between them now.

'Did you enjoy your party at the Robsons', Kitty?' she aske resuming her embroidery. Kitty did not answer. She turned t paper.

'There's been an experiment,' she said. 'An experiment wi electric light. "A brilliant light," ' she read, ' "was seen to sho forth suddenly shooting out a profound ray across the water the Rock. Everything was lit up as if by daylight." ' She pause She saw the bright light from the ships on the drawing-roo chair. But here the door opened and Hiscock came in with note on a salver.

Mrs Malone took it and read it in silence.

'No answer,' she said. From the tone of her mother's voi Kitty knew that something had happened. She sat holding t note in her hand. Hiscock shut the door.

'Rose is dead!' said Mrs Malone. 'Cousin Rose.'

The note lay open on her knee.

'It's from Edward,' she said.

'Cousin Rose is dead?' said Kitty. A moment before she had been thinking of a bright light on a red rock. Now everything looked dingy. There was a pause. There was silence. Tears stood in her mother's eyes.

'Just when the children most wanted her,' she said, sticking the needle into her embroidery. She began to roll it up very slowly. Kitty folded *The Times* and laid it on a little table, slowly, so that it should not crackle. She had only seen Cousin Rose once or twice. She felt awkward.

'Fetch me my engagement book,' said her mother at last. Kitty brought it.

'We must put off our dinner on Monday,' said Mrs Malone, looking through her engagements.

'And the Lathoms' party on Wednesday,' Kitty murmured, looking over her mother's shoulder.

'We can't put off everything,' said her mother sharply, and Kitty felt rebuked.

But there were notes to be written. She wrote them at her mother's dictation.

Why is she so ready to put off all our engagements? thought Mrs Malone, watching her write. Why doesn't she enjoy going out with me any more? She glanced through the notes that her daughter brought her.

'Why don't you take more interest in things here, Kitty?' she said irritably, pushing the letters away.

'Mama, dear—' Kitty began, deprecating the usual argument.

'But what is it you want to do?' her mother persisted. She had put away her embroidery; she was sitting upright, she was looking rather formidable.

'Your father and I only want you to do what you want to do,' she continued.

'Mama, dear—' Kitty repeated.

'You could help your father if it bores you helping me,' said Mrs Malone. 'Papa told me the other day that you never come to him now.' She referred, Kitty knew, to his history of the college. He had suggested that she should help him. Again she saw the ink flowing – she had made an awkward brush with her arm – over five generations of Oxford men, obliterating hours of her father's exquisite penmanship; and could hear him say with his usual courteous irony, 'Nature did not intend you to be a scholar, my dear,' as he applied the blotting-paper.

'I know,' she said guiltily. 'I haven't been to Papa lately. then there's always something—' She hesitated.

'Naturally,' said Mrs Malone, 'with a man in your fath position ...' Kitty sat silent. They both sat silent. They b disliked this petty bickering; they both detested these recurr scenes; and yet they seemed inevitable. Kitty got up, took letters she had written and put them in the hall.

What does she want? Mrs Malone asked herself, looking up the picture without seeing it. When I was her age ... s thought, and smiled. How well she remembered sitting at ho on a spring evening like this up in Yorkshire, miles from a where. You could hear the beat of a horse's hoof on the ro miles away. She could remember flinging up her bedroo window and looking down on the dark shrubs in the garden a crying out, 'Is this life?' And in the winter there was the sno She could still hear the snow flopping off the trees in the gard And here was Kitty, living in Oxford, in the midst of eve thing.

Kitty came back into the drawing-room and yawned ve slightly. She raised her hand to her face with an unconscio gesture of fatigue that touched her mother.

'Tired, Kitty?' she said. 'It's been a long day; you look pale.'

'And you look tired too,' said Kitty.

The bells came pushing forth one after another, one on top another, through the damp, heavy air.

'Go to bed, Kitty,' said Mrs Malone. 'There! It's striking ten.'

'But aren't you coming too, Mama?' said Kitty, standi beside her chair.

'Your father won't be back just yet,' said Mrs Malone, putti on her spectacles again.

Kitty knew it was useless to try to persuade her. It was pa of the mysterious ritual of her parents' lives. She bent dow and gave her mother the little perfunctory peck that was t only sign they ever gave each other outwardly of their affe tion. Yet they were very fond of each other; yet they alwa quarrelled.

'Good-night, and sleep well,' said Mrs Malone.

'I don't like to see your roses fade,' she added, putting her ar round her for once in a way.

She sat still after Kitty had gone. Rose is dead, she thought

Rose who was about her own age. She read the note again. It was from Edward. And Edward, she mused, is in love with Kitty, but I don't know that I want her to marry him, she thought, taking up her needle. No, not Edward. . . . There was young Lord Lasswade. . . . That would be a nice marriage, she thought. Not that I want her to be rich, not that I care about rank, she thought, threading her needle. No, but he could give her what she wants. . . . What was it? . . . Scope, she decided, beginning to stitch. Then again her thoughts turned to Rose. Rose was dead. Rose who was about her own age. That must have been the first time he proposed to her, she thought, the day we had the picnic on the moors. It was a spring day. They were itting on the grass. She could see Rose wearing a black hat with a cock's feather in it over her bright red hair. She could still see her blush and look extremely pretty when Abel rode up, much o their surprise – he was stationed at Scarborough – the day hey had the picnic on the moors.

The house at Abercorn Terrace was very dark. It smelt trongly of spring flowers. For some days now wreaths had been piled one on top of another on the hall table. In the dimness – all he blinds were drawn – the flowers gleamed; and the hall smelt with the amorous intensity of a hothouse. Wreath after wreath, they kept arriving. There were lilies with broad bars of gold in them; others with spotted throats sticky with honey; white tulips, white lilac – flowers of all kinds, some with petals s thick as velvet, others transparent, paper-thin; but all white, nd clubbed together, head to head, in circles, in ovals, in crosses so that they scarcely looked like flowers. Black-edged ards were attached to them, 'With deep sympathy from Major nd Mrs Brand'; 'With love and sympathy from General and Mrs Elkin'; 'For dearest Rose from Susan'. Each card had a few words written on it.

Even now with the hearse at the door the bell rang; a messenger boy appeared bearing more lilies. He raised his cap, as he tood in the hall, for men were lurching down the stairs carrying the coffin. Rose, in deep black, prompted by her nurse, stepped forward and dropped her little bunch of violets on the coffin. But it slipped off as it swayed down the brilliant sunlit teps on the slanting shoulders of Whiteley's men. The family ollowed after.

It was an uncertain day, with passing shadows and dart
rays of bright sunshine. The funeral started at a walking pa
Delia, getting into the second carriage with Milly and Edwa
noticed that the houses opposite had their blinds drawn in sy
pathy, but a servant peeped. The others, she noticed, did n
seem to see her; they were thinking of their mother. When th
got into the main road the pace quickened, for the drive to t
cemetery was a long one. Through the slit of the blind, De
noticed dogs playing; a beggar singing; men raising their hats
the hearse passed them. But by the time their own carria
passed, the hats were on again. Men walked briskly and unco
cernedly along the pavement. The shops were already gay wi
spring clothing; women paused and looked in at the windov
But they would have to wear nothing but black all the summ
Delia thought, looking at Edward's coal-black trousers.

They scarcely spoke, or only in little formal sentences, as
they were already taking part in the ceremony. Somehow the
relations had changed. They were more considerate, and a lit
important too, as if their mother's death had laid new r
sponsibilities on them. But the others knew how to behave;
was only she who had to make an effort. She remained outsic
and so did her father, she thought. When Martin suddenly bu
out laughing at tea, and then stopped and looked guilty, she f
– that is what Papa would do, that is what I should do if v
were honest.

She glanced out of the window again. Another man raised h
hat – a tall man, a man in a frock-coat, but she would not allo
herself to think of Mr Parnell until the funeral was over.

At last they reached the cemetery. As she took her place
the little group behind the coffin and walked up the church, s
was relieved to find that she was overcome by some generaliz
and solemn emotion. People stood up on both sides of t
church and she felt their eyes on her. Then the service began.
clergyman, a cousin, read it. The first words struck out with
rush of extraordinary beauty. Delia, standing behind her fathe
noticed how he braced himself and squared his shoulders.

'I am the resurrection and the life.'

Pent up as she had been all these days in the half-lit hou
which smelt of flowers, the outspoken words filled her wi
glory. This she could feel genuinely; this was something th
she said herself. But then, as Cousin James went on readin

omething slipped. The sense was blurred. She could not follow vith her reason. Then in the midst of the argument came nother burst of familiar beauty. 'And fade away suddenly like he grass, in the morning it is green, and groweth up; but in the vening it is cut down, dried up, and withered.' She could feel he beauty of that. Again it was like music; but then Cousin ames seemed to hurry, as if he did not altogether believe what ie was saying. He seemed to pass from the known to the un-nown; from what he believed to what he did not believe; even iis voice altered. He looked clean, he looked starched and roned like his robes. But what did he mean by what he was aying? She gave it up. Either one understood or one did not inderstand, she thought. Her mind wandered.

But I will not think of him, she thought, seeing a tall man vho stood beside her on a platform and raised his hat, until it's ver. She fixed her eyes upon her father. She watched him dab a reat white pocket-handkerchief to his eyes and put it in his ocket; then he pulled it out and dabbed his eyes with it again. Then the voice stopped; he put his handkerchief finally in his ocket; and again they all formed up, the little group of the amily, behind the coffin and again the dark people on either ide rose, and watched them and let them go first and followed fter.

It was a relief to feel the soft damp air blowing its leafy smell in her face again. But again now that she was out of doors, she began to notice things. She noticed how the black funeral horses were pawing the ground; they were scraping little pits with their hooves in the yellow gravel. She remembered hearing that funeral horses came from Belgium and were very vicious. They looked vicious she thought; their black necks were flecked with foam – but she recalled herself. They went straggling in ones and twos along a path until they reached a fresh mound of yellow earth heaped beside a pit; and there again she noticed how the grave-diggers stood at a little distance, rather behind, with their spades.

There was a pause; people kept on arriving and took up their positions, some a little higher, some a little lower. She observed a poor-looking shabby woman prowling on the outskirts, and tried to think whether she were some old servant, but she could not put a name to her. Her Uncle Digby, her father's brother, stood directly opposite her, with his top-hat held like some

sacred vessel between his hands, the image of grave decor
Some of the women were crying; but not the men; the men
one pose; the women had another, she observed. Then it
began again. The splendid gust of music blew through ther
'Man that is born of a woman': the ceremony had renev
itself; once more they were grouped, united. The family pres
a little closer to the graveside and looked fixedly at the co
which lay with its polish and its brass handles there in the ea
to be buried for ever. It looked too new to be buried for ev
She stared down into the grave. There lay her mother; in t
coffin – the woman she had loved and hated so. Her eyes d
zled. She was afraid that she might faint; but she must look;
must feel; it was the last chance that was left her. Ea
dropped on the coffin; three pebbles fell on the hard shiny s
face; and as they dropped she was possessed by a sense of sor
thing everlasting; of life mixing with death, of death becom
life. For as she looked she heard the sparrow's chirp quicker a
quicker; she heard wheels in the distance sound louder a
louder; life came closer and closer. . . .

'We give thee hearty thanks,' said the voice, 'for that it l
pleased thee to deliver this our sister out of the miseries of t
sinful world—'

What a lie! she cried to herself. What a damnable lie! He l
robbed her of the one feeling that was genuine; he had spo
her one moment of understanding.

She looked up. She saw Morris and Eleanor side by side; th
faces were blurred; their noses were red; the tears were runni
down them. As for her father he was so stiff and so rigid tl
she had a convulsive desire to laugh aloud. Nobody can feel l
that, she thought. He's overdoing it. None of us feel anything
all, she thought: we're all pretending.

Then there was a general movement; the attempt at co
centration was over. People strolled off this way and that; th
was no attempt now to form into a procession; little grou
came together; people shook hands rather furtively, among t
graves, and even smiled.

'How good of you to come!' said Edward, shaking hands w
old Sir James Graham, who gave him a little pat on the should
Ought she to go and thank him too? The graves made it difficu
It was becoming a shrouded and subdued morning party amo
the graves. She hesitated – she did not know what she ought

do next. Her father had walked on. She looked back. The grave-diggers had come forward; they were piling the wreaths one on top of another neatly; and the prowling woman had joined them and was stooping down to read the names on the cards. The ceremony was over; rain was falling.

1891

The autumn wind blew over England. It twitched the leaves o the trees, and down they fluttered, spotted red and yellow, sent them floating, flaunting in wide curves before they settle In towns coming in gusts round the corners, the wind blew he a hat off; there lifted a veil high above a woman's head. Mon was in brisk circulation. The streets were crowded. Upon t sloping desks of the offices near St Paul's, clerks paused wi their pens on the ruled page. It was difficult to work after t holidays. Margate, Eastbourne and Brighton had bronzed the and tanned them. The sparrows and starlings, making their di cordant chatter round the eaves of St Martin's, whitened t heads of the sleek statues holding rods or rolls of paper in Pa liament Square. Blowing behind the boat train, the wind ruffle the channel, tossed the grapes in Provence, and made the laz fisher boy, who was lying on his back in his boat in the Med terranean, roll over and snatch a rope.

But in England, in the North, it was cold. Kitty, Lady La swade, sitting on the terrace beside her husband and his spanie drew the cloak round her shoulders. She was looking at the hi top, where the snuffer-shaped monument raised by the old Ea made a mark for ships at sea. There was mist on the wood Near at hand the stone ladies on the terrace had scarlet flowe in their urns. Thin blue smoke drifted across the flaming dahli in the long beds that went down to the river. 'Burning weeds she said aloud. Then there was a tap on the window, and he little boy in a pink frock stumbled out, holding his spotte horse.

In Devonshire where the round red hills and the steep valley hoarded the sea air leaves were still thick on the trees – to thick, Hugh Gibbs said at breakfast. Too thick for shooting, h said, and Milly, his wife, left him to go to his meeting. With he basket on her arm she walked down the well-kept crazy pave ment with the swaying movement of a woman with chil There hung the yellow pears on the orchard wall, lifting th leaves over them, they were so swollen. But the wasps had go

at them – the skin was broken. With her hand on the fruit she paused. Pop, pop, pop sounded in the distant woods. Someone was shooting.

The smoke hung in veils over the spires and domes of the University cities. Here it choked the mouth of a gargoyle; there it clung to the walls that were peeled yellow. Edward, who was taking his brisk constitutional, noted smell, sound and colour; which suggested how complex impressions are; few poets compress enough; but there must be some line in Greek or Latin, he was thinking, which sums up the contrast, – when Mrs Lathom passed him and he raised his cap.

In the Law Courts the leaves lay dry and angular on the flagstones. Morris, remembering his childhood, shuffled his feet through them on his way to his chambers, and they scattered edgeways along the gutters. Not yet trodden down they lay in Kensington Gardens, and children, crunching the shells as they ran, scooped up a handful and scudded on through the mist down the avenues, with their hoops.

Racing over the hills in the country the wind blew vast rings of shadow that dwindled again to green. But in London the streets narrowed the clouds; mist hung thick in the East End by the river; made the voices of men crying 'Any old iron to sell, any old iron,' sound distant; and in the suburbs the organs were muted. The wind blew the smoke – for in every back garden in the angle of the ivy-grown wall that still sheltered a few last geraniums, leaves were heaped up; keen fanged flames were eating them – out into the street, into windows that stood open in the drawing-room in the morning. For it was October, the birth of the year.

Eleanor was sitting at her writing-table with her pen in her hand. It's awfully queer, she thought, touching the ink-corroded patch of bristle on the back of Martin's walrus with the point of her pen, that *that* should have gone on all these years. That solid object might survive them all. If she threw it away it would still exist somewhere or other. But she never had thrown it away because it was part of other things – her mother for example. . . . She drew on her blotting-paper; a dot with strokes raying out round it. Then she looked up. They were burning weeds in the back garden; there was a drift of smoke; a sharp acrid smell; and leaves were falling. A barrel organ was playing up the

street. 'Sur le pont d'Avignon' she hummed in time to it. Ho did it go? – the song Pippy used to sing as she wiped your ea with a piece of slimy flannel?

'Ron, ron, ron, et plon, plon, plon,' she hummed. Then t tune stopped. The organ had moved further away. She dipp her pen in the ink.

'Three times eight,' she murmured, 'is twenty-four,' she sa decidedly; wrote a figure at the bottom of the page, swe together the little red and blue books and took them to h father's study.

'Here's the housekeeper!' he said good-humouredly as sh came in. He was sitting in his leather armchair reading a pinkis financial paper.

'Here's the housekeeper,' he repeated, looking up over h glasses. He was getting slower and slower, she thought; and sh was in a hurry. But they got on extremely well; they we almost like brother and sister. He put down his paper and we to the writing-table.

But I wish you would hurry, Papa, she thought as sh watched the deliberate way in which he unlocked the drawer i which he kept his cheque-book, or I shall be late.

'Milk's very high,' he said, tapping the book with the gilt cov

'Yes. It's eggs in October,' she said.

As he made out the cheque with extreme deliberation sh glanced round the room. It looked like an office, with its files c papers and its deed-boxes, except that horses' bits hung by th fireplace, and there was the silver cup he had won at pol Would he sit there all the morning reading the financial pape and considering his investments, she wondered? He stoppe writing.

'And where are you off to now?' he asked with his shrew little smile.

'A Committee,' she said.

'A Committee,' he repeated, signing his firm heavy signatur 'Well, stand up for yourself; don't be sat on, Nell.' He entered figure in the ledger.

'Are you coming with me this afternoon, Papa?' she said as h finished writing the figure. 'It's Morris's case you know; at th Law Courts.'

He shook his head.

'No; I've got to be in the City at three,' he said.

'Then I shall see you at lunch,' she said, making a movement to go. But he held up his hand. He had something to say, but he hesitated. He was getting rather heavier in the face, she noted; there were little veins in his nose; he was getting rather too red and heavy.

'I was thinking of looking in at the Digbys',' he said, at length. He got up and walked to the window. He looked out at the back garden. She fidgeted.

'How the leaves are falling!' he remarked.

'Yes,' she said. 'They're burning weeds.'

He stood looking at the smoke for a moment.

'Burning weeds,' he repeated, and stopped.

'It's Maggie's birthday,' at last he came out with it. 'I thought I'd take her some little present—' He paused. He meant that he wished her to buy it, she knew.

'What would you like to give her?' she asked.

'Well,' he said vaguely, 'something pretty you know – something she could wear.'

Eleanor reflected – Maggie, her little cousin; was she seven or eight?

'A necklace? A brooch? Something like that?' she asked quickly.

'Yes, something like that,' said her father, settling down in his chair again. 'Something pretty, something she could wear, you know.' He opened the paper and gave her a little nod. 'Thank you, my dear,' he said as she left the room.

On the hall table, between a silver salver laden with visiting-cards – some with their corners turned down, some large, some small – and a piece of purple plush with which the Colonel polished his top hat – lay a thin foreign envelope with 'England' marked in large letters in the corner. Eleanor, running down the stairs in a hurry, swept it into her bag as she passed. Then she ran at a peculiar ambling trot down the Terrace. At the corner she stopped and looked anxiously down the road. Among the other traffic she singled out one bulky form; mercifully, it was yellow; mercifully she had caught her bus. She hailed it and climbed on top. She sighed with relief as she pulled the leather apron over her knees. All responsibility now rested with the driver. She relaxed; she breathed in the soft London air; she

heard the dull London roar with pleasure. She looked along
street and relished the sight of cabs, vans and carriages all t
ting past with an end in view. She liked coming back in Octo
to the full stir of life after the summer was over. She had b
staying in Devonshire with the Gibbses. That's turned out v
well, she thought, thinking of her sister's marriage to Hu
Gibbs, seeing Milly with her babies. And Hugh – she smiled.
rode about on a great white horse, breaking up litters. But th
are too many trees and cows and too many little hills instead
one big one, she thought. She did not like Devonshire. She v
glad to be back in London, on top of the yellow bus, with l
bag stuffed with papers, and everything beginning again in
tober. They had left the residential quarter; the houses w
changing; they were turning into shops. This was her wor
here she was in her element. The streets were crowded; wom
were swarming in and out of shops with their shopping bask
There was something customary, rhythmical about it, s
thought, like rooks swooping in a field, rising and falling.

She, too, was going to her work – she turned her watch on l
wrist without looking at it. After the Committee, Duffus; af
Duffus, Dickson. Then lunch; and the Law Courts ... th
lunch and the Law Courts at two-thirty, she repeated. The b
trundled along the Bayswater Road. The streets were becomi
poorer and poorer.

Perhaps I oughtn't to have given the job to Duffus, she said
herself – she was thinking of Peter Street where she had bu
houses; the roof was leaking again; there was a bad smell in t
sink. But here the omnibus stopped; people got in and out; t
omnibus went on again – but it's better to give the work to
small man, she thought, looking at the huge plate-glass windo
of one of the large shops, instead of going to one of those b
firms. There were always small shops side by side with b
shops. It puzzled her. How did the small shops manage to ma
a living? she wondered. But if Duffus, she began – here t
omnibus stopped; she looked up; she rose '— if Duffus thinks
can bully me,' she said as she went down the steps, 'he'll fi
he's mistaken.'

She walked quickly up the cinder path to the galvanized ir
shed in which the meeting took place. She was late; there th
were already. It was her first meeting since the holidays, a
they all smiled at her. Judd even took his toothpick out of h

mouth – a sign of recognition that flattered her. Here we all are again, she thought, taking her place and laying her papers on the table.

But she meant 'them', not herself. She did not exist; she was not anybody at all. But there they all were – Brocket, Cufnell, Miss Sims, Ramsden, Major Porter and Mrs Lazenby. The Major preaching organization; Miss Sims (ex-mill hand) scenting condescension; Mrs Lazenby, offering to write to her cousin Sir John upon which Judd, the retired shopkeeper, snubbed her. She smiled as she took her seat. Miriam Parrish was reading letters. But why starve yourself, Eleanor asked as she listened. She was thinner than ever.

She looked round the room as the letters were read. There had been a dance. Festoons of red and yellow paper were slung across the ceiling. The coloured picture of the Princess of Wales had loops of yellow roses at the corners; a sea-green ribbon across her breast, a round yellow dog on her lap, and pearls slung and knotted over her shoulders. She wore an air of serenity, of indifference; a queer comment upon their divisions, Eleanor thought; something that the Lazenbys worshipped; that Miss Sims derided; that Judd looked at cocking his eyebrows, picking his teeth. If he had had a son, he had told her, he would have sent him to the Varsity. But she recalled herself. Major Porter had turned to her.

'Now, Miss Pargiter,' he said, drawing her in, because they were both of the same social standing, 'you haven't given us your opinion.'

She pulled herself together and gave him her opinion. She had an opinion – a very definite opinion. She cleared her throat and began.

The smoke blowing through Peter Street had condensed, between the narrowness of the houses, into a fine grey veil. But the houses on either side were clearly visible. Save for two in the middle of the street, they were all precisely the same – yellow-grey boxes with slate tents on top. Nothing whatever was happening; a few children were playing in the street, two cats turned something over in the gutter with their paws. Yet a woman leaning out of the windows searched this way, that way, up and down the street as if she were raking every cranny for something to feed on. Her eyes, rapacious, greedy, like the

eyes of a bird of prey, were also sulky and sleepy, as if they h nothing to feed their hunger upon. Nothing happened – nothi whatever. Still she gazed up and down with her indolent d satisfied stare. Then a trap turned the corner. She watched it. stopped in front of the houses opposite which, since the si were green, and there was a plaque with a sunflower stamp on it over the door, were different from the others. A little m in a tweed cap got out and rapped at the door. It was opened a woman who was about to have a baby. She shook her hea looked up and down the street; then shut the door. The m waited. The horse stood patiently with the reins drooping a its head bent. Another woman appeared at the window, with white many-chinned face, and an under lip that stood out like ledge. Leaning out of the window side by side the two wom watched the man. He was bandy-legged; he was smoking. Th passed some remark about him together. He walked up a down as if he were waiting for somebody. Now he threw aw his cigarette. They watched him. What would he do next? W he going to give his horse a feed? But here a tall woman weari a coat and skirt of grey tweed came round the corner hastil and the little man turned and touched his cap.

'Sorry I'm late,' Eleanor called out, and Duffus touched h cap with the friendly smile that always pleased her.

'That's all right, Miss Pargiter,' he said. She always hoped th he did not feel that she was the ordinary employer.

'Now we'll go over it,' she said. She hated the job, but it had be done.

The door was opened by Mrs Toms, the downstairs lodger.

Oh dear, thought Eleanor, observing the slant of her apro another baby coming, after all I told her.

They went from room to room of the little house, Mrs Tom and Mrs Grove following after. There was a crack here; a stai there. Duffus had a foot-rule in his hand with which he tappe the plaster. The worst of it is, she thought, as she let Mrs Tom do the talking, that I can't help liking him. It was his Wels accent largely; he was a charming ruffian. He was as supple a eel, she knew; but when he talked like that, in that sing-son which reminded her of Welsh valleys. . . . But he had cheate her at every point. There was a hole you could poke your finge through in the plaster.

'Look at that, Mr Duffus, there—' she said, stooping and poking her finger. He was licking his pencil. She loved going to his yard with him and seeing him size up planks and bricks; she loved his technical words for things, his little hard words.

'Now we'll go upstairs,' she said. He seemed to her like a fly struggling to haul itself up out of a saucer. It was touch and go with small employers like Duffus; they might haul themselves up and become the Judds of their day and send their sons to the Varsity; or on the other hand they might fall in and then— He had a wife and five children; she had seen them in the room behind the shop, playing with reels of cotton on the floor. And she always hoped that they would ask her in. . . . But here was the top floor where old Mrs Potter lay bedridden. She knocked; she called out in a loud cheerful voice, 'May we come in?'

There was no answer. The old woman was stone deaf; so in they went. There she was, as usual, doing nothing whatever, propped up in the corner of her bed.

'I've brought Mr Duffus to look at your ceiling,' Eleanor shouted.

The old woman looked up and began plucking with her hands like a large tousled ape. She looked at them wildly, suspiciously.

'The ceiling, Mr Duffus,' said Eleanor. She pointed to a yellow stain on the ceiling. The house had only been built five years; and yet everything wanted repairing. Duffus threw open the window and leant out. Mrs Potter clutched hold of Eleanor's hand, as if she suspected that they were going to hurt her.

'We've come to look at your ceiling,' Eleanor repeated very loudly. But the words conveyed nothing. The old woman went off into a whining plaint; the words ran themselves together into a chant that was half plaint, half curse. If only the Lord would take her. Every night, she said, she implored Him to let her go. All her children were dead.

'When I wake in the morning . . .' she began.

'Yes, yes, Mrs Potter,' Eleanor tried to soothe her; but her hands were firmly grasped.

'I pray Him to let me go,' Mrs Potter continued.

'It's the leaves in the gutter,' said Duffus, popping his head in again.

'And the pain—' Mrs Potter stretched out her hands; they were knotted and grooved like the gnarled roots of a tree.

'Yes, yes,' said Eleanor. 'But there's a leak; it's not only th dead leaves,' she said to Duffus.

Duffus put his head out again.

'We're going to make you more comfortable,' Eleano shouted to the old woman. Now she was cringing and fawning now she had pressed her hand to her lips.

Duffus drew his head in again.

'Have you found out what's wrong?' Eleanor said to hin sharply. He was entering something in his pocket-book. Sh longed to go. Mrs Potter was asking her to feel her shoulder. Sh felt her shoulder. Her hand was still grasped. There was medi cine on the table; Miriam Parrish came every week. Why do w do it? she asked herself as Mrs Potter went on talking. Why do we force her to live? she asked, looking at the medicine on the table. She could stand it no longer. She withdrew her hand.

'Good-bye, Mrs Potter,' she shouted. She was insincere; sh was hearty. 'We're going to mend your ceiling,' she shouted She shut the door. Mrs Groves waddled in advance of her to show her the sink in the scullery. A wisp of yellow hair hung down behind her dirty ears. If I had to do this every day of my life, Eleanor thought, as she followed them down into the scullery, I should become a bag of bones like Miriam; with a string of beads. ... And what's the use of that? she thought, stooping to smell the sink in the scullery.

'Well, Duffus,' she said, facing him when the inspection was over, with the smell of drains still in her nose. 'What d'you propose to do about it?'

Her anger was rising; it was his fault largely. He had swindled her. But as she stood facing him and observed his little underfed body, and how his bow tie had worked up over his collar, she felt uncomfortable.

He shuffled and squirmed; she felt that she was going to lose her temper.

'If you can't make a good job of it,' she said curtly, 'I shall employ somebody else.' She adopted the tone of the Colonel's daughter; the upper middle-class tone that she detested. She saw him turn sullen before her eyes. But she rubbed it in.

'You ought to be ashamed of it,' she told him. He was im- pressed she could see. 'Good morning,' she said briefly.

The ingratiating smile was not produced for her benefit again, she observed. But you have to bully them or else they despise

you, she thought as Mrs Toms let her out, and once more she observed the slant in her apron. A crowd of children stood round staring at Duffus's pony. But none of them, she noticed, dared stroke the pony's nose.

She was late. She gave one look at the sunflower on the terra-cotta plaque. That symbol of her girlish sentiment amused her grimly. She had meant it to signify flowers, fields in the heart of London; but now it was cracked. She broke into her usual ambling trot. The movement seemed to break up the disagreeable crust; to jolt off the grasp of the old woman's hand that was still on her shoulder. She ran; she dodged. Shopping women got in her way. She dashed into the road waving her hand among the carts and horses. The conductor saw her, curved his arm round her and hauled her up. She had caught her bus.

She trod on the toe of a man in the corner, and pitched down between two elderly women. She was panting slightly; her hair was coming down; she was red with running. She cast a glance at her fellow-passengers. They all looked settled, elderly, as if their minds were made up. For some reason she always felt that she was the youngest person in an omnibus, but today, since she had won her scrap with Judd, she felt that she was grown up. The grey line of houses jolted up and down before her eyes as the omnibus trundled along the Bayswater Road. The shops were turning into houses; there were big houses and little houses; public houses and private houses. And here a church raised its filigree spire. Underneath were pipes, wires, drains. . . . Her lips began moving. She was talking to herself. There's always a public house, a library and a church, she was muttering.

The man on whose toe she had trodden sized her up; a well-known type; with a bag; philanthropic; well nourished; a spinster; a virgin; like all the women of her class, cold; her passions had never been touched; yet not unattractive. She was laughing. . . . Here she looked up and caught his eye. She had been talking aloud to herself in an omnibus. She must cure herself of the habit. She must wait till she brushed her teeth. But luckily the bus was stopping. She jumped out. She began to walk quickly up Melrose Place. She felt vigorous and young. She noticed everything freshly after Devonshire. She looked down the long

many-pillared vista of Abercorn Terrace. The houses, with thei
pillars and their front gardens, all looked highly respectable; i
every front room she seemed to see a parlourmaid's arm swee
over the table, laying it for luncheon. In several rooms they wer
already sitting down to luncheon; she could see them betwee
the tent-shaped opening made by the curtains. She would be lat
for her own luncheon, she thought as she ran up the front step
and fitted her latch-key in the door. Then, as if someone wer
speaking, words formed in her mind. 'Something pretty, somethin
to wear.' She stopped with her key in the lock. Maggie's birth
day; her father's present; she had forgotten it. She paused. Sh
turned, she ran down the steps again. She must go to Lamley's.

Mrs Lamley, who had grown stout these last years, was mas
ticating a mouthful of cold mutton in the back room when sh
saw Miss Eleanor through the glass door.

'Good morning, Miss Eleanor,' she began, coming out.

'Something pretty, something to wear,' Eleanor panted. Sh
was looking very well – quite brown after her holiday, Mr
Lamley noticed.

'For my niece – I mean cousin. Sir Digby's little girl,' Eleano
brought out.

Mrs Lamley deprecated the cheapness of her goods.

There were toy boats; dolls; twopenny gold watches – bu
nothing nice enough for Sir Digby's little girl. But Miss Eleano
was in a hurry.

'There,' she said, pointing to a card of bead necklaces. 'That'l
do.'

It looked a little cheap, Mrs Lamley thought; reaching down a
blue necklace with gold spots, but Miss Eleanor was in such a
hurry that she wouldn't even have it wrapped in brown paper.

'I shall be late as it is, Mrs Lamley,' she said, with a genial
wave of her hand; and off she ran.

Mrs Lamley liked her. She always seemed so friendly. It was
such a pity she didn't marry – such a mistake to let the younger
sister marry before the elder. But then she had the Colonel to
look after, and he was getting on now, Mrs Lamley concluded,
going back to her mutton in the back shop.

'Miss Eleanor won't be a minute,' said the Colonel as Crosby
brought in the dishes. 'Leave the covers on.' He stood with his
back to the fireplace waiting for her. Yes, he thought, I don't see

why not. 'I don't see why not,' he repeated, looking at the dish-cover. Mira was on the scene again; the other fellow had turned out, as he knew he would, a bad egg. And what provision was he to make for Mira? What was he to do about it? It had struck him that he would like to put the whole thing before Eleanor. Why not after all? She's not a child any longer, he thought; and he didn't like this business of – of – shutting things up in drawers. But he felt some shyness at the thought of telling his own daughter.

'Here she is,' he said abruptly to Crosby, who stood waiting mutely behind him.

No, no, he said to himself with sudden conviction, as Eleanor came in. I can't do it. For some reason when he saw her he realized that he could not tell her. And after all, he thought, seeing how bright-cheeked, how unconcerned she looked, she has her own life to live. A spasm of jealousy passed through him. She's got her own affairs to think about, he thought as they sat down.

She pushed a necklace across the table towards him.

'Hullo, what's that?' he said, looking at it blankly.

'Maggie's present, Papa,' she said. 'The best I could do. . . . I'm afraid it's rather cheap.'

'Yes; that'll do very nicely,' he said, glancing at it absent-mindedly. 'Just what she'll like,' he added, shoving it to one side. He began to carve the chicken.

She was very hungry; she was still rather breathless. She felt a little 'spun round', as she put it to herself. What did you spin things round on? she wondered, helping herself to bread sauce – a pivot? The scene had changed so often that morning; and every scene required a different adjustment; bringing this to the front; sinking that to the depths. And now she felt nothing; hungry merely; merely a chicken-eater; blank. But as she ate, the sense of her father imposed itself. She liked his solidity, as he sat opposite her munching his chicken methodically. What had he been doing, she wondered. Taking shares out of one company and putting them in another? He roused himself.

'Well, how was the Committee?' he asked. She told him, exaggerating her triumph with Judd.

'That's right. Stand up to 'em, Nell. Don't let yourself be sat on,' he said. He was proud of her in his own way; and she liked him to be proud of her. At the same time she did not mention

Duffus and Rigby Cottages. He had no sympathy with peopl who were foolish about money, and she never got a penny interest: it all went on repairs. She turned the conversation to Morris and his case at the Law Courts. She looked at her watcl again. Her sister-in-law Celia had told her to meet her at the Law Courts at two-thirty sharp.

'I shall have to hurry,' she said.

'Ah, but these lawyer chaps always know how to spin thing out,' said the Colonel. 'Who's the Judge?'

'Sanders Curry,' said Eleanor.

'Then it'll last till Domesday,' said the Colonel.

'Which Court's he sitting in?' he asked.

Eleanor did not know.

'Here, Crosby—' said the Colonel. He sent Crosby for *The Times*. He began opening and turning the great sheets with his clumsy fingers as Eleanor swallowed her tart. By the time she had poured out coffee he had found out in which court the case was being heard.

'And you're going to the City, Papa?' she said as she put down her cup.

'Yes. To a meeting,' he said. He loved going to the City, whatever he did there.

'Odd it should be Curry who's trying the case,' she said, rising. They had dined with him not long ago in a dreary great house somewhere off Queen's Gate.

'D'you remember that party?' she said, getting up. 'The old oak?' Curry collected oak chests.

'All shams I suspect,' said her father. 'Don't hurry,' he expostulated. 'Take a cab, Nell – if you want any change—' he began, fumbling with his curtailed fingers for silver. As she watched him Eleanor felt the cold childish feeling that his pockets were bottomless silver mines from which half-crowns could be dug eternally.

'Well, then,' she said, taking the coins, 'we shall meet at tea.'

'No,' he reminded her, 'I'm going round by the Digbys'.'

He took the necklace in his large hairy hand. It looked a little cheap, Eleanor was afraid.

'And what about a box for this, eh?' he asked.

'Crosby, find a box for the necklace,' said Eleanor. And Crosby, suddenly radiating importance, hurried off to the basement.

'It'll be dinner then,' she said to her father. That'll mean, she thought with relief, that I needn't be back for tea.

'Yes, dinner,' he said. He held a spill of paper in his hand which he was applying to the end of his cigar. He sucked. A little puff of smoke rose from the cigar. She liked the smell of cigars. She stood for a moment and drew it in.

'And give my love to Aunt Eugénie,' she said. He nodded as he puffed at his cigar.

It was a treat to take a hansom – it saved fifteen minutes. She leant back in the corner, with a little sigh of content, as the flaps clicked above her knees. For a minute her mind was completely vacant. She enjoyed the peace, the silence, the rest from exertion as she sat there in the corner of the cab. She felt detached, a spectator, as it trotted along. The morning had been a rush; one thing on top of another. Now, until she reached the Law Courts, she could sit and do nothing. It was a long way; and the horse was a plodding horse, a red-coated hairy horse. It kept up its steady jog-trot all down the Bayswater Road. There was very little traffic; people were still at luncheon. A soft grey mist filled up the distance; the bells jingled; the houses passed. She ceased to notice what houses they were passing. She half shut her eyes, and then, involuntarily, she saw her own hand take a letter from the hall table. When? That very morning. What had she done with it? Put it in her bag? Yes. There it was, unopened; a letter from Martin in India. She would read it as they drove along. It was written on very thin paper in Martin's little hand. It was longer than usual; it was about an adventure with somebody called Renton. Who was Renton? She could not remember. 'We started at dawn,' she read.

She looked out of the window. They were being held up by traffic at the Marble Arch. Carriages were coming out of the Park. A horse pranced; but the coachman had him well in hand.

She read again: 'I found myself alone in the middle of the jungle. . . .'

But what were you doing? she asked.

She saw her brother; his red hair; his round face; and the rather pugnacious expression which always made her afraid that he would get himself into trouble one of these days. And so he had, apparently.

'I had lost my way; and the sun was sinking,' she read.

'The sun was sinking . . .' Eleanor repeated, glancing ahead o her down Oxford Street. The sun shone on dresses in a window A jungle was a very thick wood, she supposed; made of stuntec little trees; dark green in colour. Martin was in the jungle alone and the sun was sinking. What happened next? 'I thought i better to stay where I was.' So he stood in the midst of littl trees alone, in the jungle; and the sun was sinking. The stree before her lost its detail. It must have been cold, she thought when the sun sank. She read again. He had to make a fire. ' looked in my pocket and found that I had only two matches . . The first match went out.' She saw a heap of dry sticks anc Martin alone watching the match go out. 'Then I lit the other and by sheer luck it did the trick.' The paper began to burn; the twigs caught; a fan of fire blazed up. She skipped on in her anxiety to reach the end . . . '—once I thought I heard voices shouting, but they died away.'

'They died away!' said Eleanor aloud.

They had stopped at Chancery Lane. An old woman was being helped across the road by a policeman; but the road was a jungle.

'They died away,' she said. 'And then?'

'. . . I climbed a tree . . . I saw the track . . . the sun was rising . . . They had given me up for dead.'

The cab stopped. For a moment Eleanor sat still. She saw nothing but stunted little trees, and her brother looking at the sun rising over the jungle. The sun was rising. Flames for a moment danced over the vast funereal mass of the Law Courts. It was the second match that did the trick, she said to herself as she paid the driver and went in.

'Oh, there you are!' cried a little woman in furs, who was standing by one of the doors.

'I had given you up. I was just going in.' She was a small cat-faced woman, worried, but very proud of her husband.

They pushed through the swing-doors into the Court where the case was being tried. It seemed dark and crowded at first. Men in wigs and gowns were getting up and sitting down and coming and going out like a flock of birds settling here and there on a field. They all looked unfamiliar; she could not see Morris. She looked about her, trying to find him.

'There he is,' Celia whispered.

One of the barristers in the front row turned his head. It was Morris; but how odd he looked in his yellow wig! His glance passed over them without any sign of recognition. Nor did she smile at him; the solemn sallow atmosphere forbade personalities; there was something ceremonial about it all. From where she sat she could see his face in profile; the wig squared his forehead, and gave him a framed look, like a picture. Never had she seen him to such advantage; with such a brow, with such a nose. She glanced round. They all looked like pictures; all the barristers looked emphatic, cut out, like eighteenth century portraits hung upon a wall. They were still rising and settling, laughing, talking. ... Suddenly a door was thrown open. The usher demanded silence for his lordship. There was silence; everybody stood up; and the Judge came in. He made one bow and took his seat under the Lion and the Unicorn. Eleanor felt a little thrill of awe run through her. That was old Curry. But how transformed! Last time she had seen him he was sitting at the head of a dinner-table; a long yellow strip of embroidery went rippling down the middle; and he had taken her, with a candle, round the drawing-room to look at his old oak. But now, there he was, awful, magisterial, in his robes.

A barrister had risen. She tried to follow what the man with a big nose was saying; but it was difficult to pick it up now. She listened, however. Then another barrister rose – a chicken-breasted little man, wearing gold pince-nez. He was reading some document; then he too began to argue. She could understand parts of what he was saying; though how it bore on the case she did not know. When was Morris going to speak, she wondered? Not yet apparently. As her father had said, these lawyer chaps knew how to spin things out. There had been no need to hurry over luncheon; an omnibus would have done just as well. She fixed her eyes on Morris. He was cracking some joke with the sandy man next to him. Those were his cronies, she thought; this was his life. She remembered his passion for the Bar as a boy. It was she who had talked Papa round; one morning she had taken her life in her hand and gone to his study . . . but now, to her excitement, Morris himself got up.

She felt her sister-in-law stiffen with nervousness and clasp her little bag tightly. Morris looked very tall, and very black and white as he began. One hand was on the edge of his gown. How

well she knew that gesture of Morris's, she thought – grasping something, so that you saw the white scar where he had cut himself bathing. But she did not recognize the other gesture – the way he flung his arm out. That belonged to his public life, his life in the Courts. And his voice was unfamiliar. But every now and then as he warmed to his speech, there was a tone in his voice that made her smile; it was his private voice. She could not help half turning to her sister-in-law as if to say, How like Morris! But Celia was looking with absolute fixity ahead of her at her husband. Eleanor, too, tried to fix her mind upon the argument. He spoke with extraordinary clearness; he spaced his words beautifully. Suddenly the Judge interrupted:

'Do I understand you to hold, Mr Pargiter ...?' he said in urbane yet awful tones; and Eleanor was thrilled to see how instantly Morris stopped short; how respectfully he bent his head as the Judge spoke.

But will he know the answer? she thought, as if he were a child, shifting in her seat with nervousness lest he might break down. But he had the answer at his finger-ends. Without hurry or flutter he opened a book; found his place; read out a passage, upon which old Curry nodded, and made a note in the great volume that lay open in front of him. She was immensely relieved.

'How well he did that!' she whispered. Her sister-in-law nodded; but she still grasped her bag tightly. Eleanor felt that she could relax. She glanced round her. It was an odd mixture of solemnity and licence. Barristers kept coming in and out. They stood leaning against the wall of the Court. In the pale top light all their faces looked parchment-coloured; all their features seemed cut out. They had lit the gas. She gazed at the Judge himself. He was now lying back in his great carved chair under the Lion and the Unicorn, listening. He looked infinitely sad and wise, as if words had been beating upon him for centuries. Now he opened his heavy eyes, wrinkled his forehead, and the little hand that emerged frailly from the enormous cuff wrote a few words in the great volume. Then again he lapsed with half-shut eyes into his eternal vigil over the strife of unhappy human beings. Her mind wandered. She leant back against the hard wooden seat and let the tide of oblivion flow over her. Scenes from her morning began to form themselves; to obtrude themselves. Judd at the Committee; her father reading the paper; the

old woman plucking at her hand; the parlourmaid sweeping the silver over the table; and Martin lighting his second match in the jungle. . . .

She fidgeted. The air was fuggy; the light dim; and the Judge now that the first glamour had worn off, looked fretful; no longer immune from human weakness, and she remembered with a smile how very gullible he was, there in that hideous house in Queen's Gate, about old oak. 'This I picked up at Whitby,' he had said. And it was a sham. She wanted to laugh; she wanted to move. She rose and whispered:

'I'm going.'

Her sister-in-law made a little murmur, perhaps of protest. But Eleanor made her way as silently as she could through the swing doors, out into the street.

The uproar, the confusion, the space of the Strand came upon her with a shock of relief. She felt herself expand. It was still daylight here; a rush, a stir, a turmoil of variegated life came racing towards her. It was as if something had broken loose – in her, in the world. She seemed, after her concentration, to be dissipated, tossed about. She wandered along the Strand, looking with pleasure at the racing street; at the shops full of bright chains and leather cases; at the white-faced churches; at the irregular jagged roofs laced across and across with wires. Above was the dazzle of a watery but gleaming sky. The wind blew in her face. She breathed in a gulp of fresh wet air. And that man, she thought, thinking of the dark little Court and its cut-out faces, has to sit there all day, every day. She saw Sanders Curry again, lying back in his great chair, with his face falling in folds of iron. Every day, all day, she thought, arguing points of law. How could Morris stand it? But he had always wanted to go to the Bar.

Cabs, vans and omnibuses streamed past; they seemed to rush the air into her face; they splashed the mud on to the pavement. People jostled and hustled and she quickened her pace in time with theirs. She was stopped by a van turning down one of the little steep streets that led to the river. She looked up and saw the clouds moving between the roofs, dark clouds, rain-swollen; wandering, indifferent clouds. She walked on.

Again she was stopped at the entrance to Charing Cross station. The sky was wide at that point. She saw a file of birds

flying high, flying together; crossing the sky. She watched them Again she walked on. People on foot, people in cabs were bein sucked in like straws round the piers of a bridge; she had t wait. Cabs piled with boxes went past her.

She envied them. She wished she were going abroad; to Ital to India. . . . Then she felt vaguely that something was hap-pening. The paper-boys at the gates were dealing out paper with unusual rapidity. Men were snatching them and opening them and reading them as they walked on. She looked at a plac-ard that was crumpled across a boy's legs. 'Death' was writter in very large black letters.

Then the placard blew straight, and she read another word: 'Parnell.'

'Dead' . . . she repeated. 'Parnell.' She was dazed for a moment. How could he be dead – Parnell? She bought a paper. They said so. . . .

'Parnell is dead!' she said aloud. She looked up and saw the sky again; clouds were passing; she looked down into the street. A man pointed at the news with his forefinger. Parnell is dead he was saying. He was gloating. But how could he be dead? It was like something fading in the sky.

She walked slowly along towards Trafalgar Square, holding the paper in her hand. Suddenly the whole scene froze into immobility. A man was joined to a pillar; a lion was joined to a man; they seemed stilled, connected, as if they would never move again.

She crossed into Trafalgar Square. Birds chattered shrilly somewhere. She stopped by the fountain and looked down into the large basin full of water. The water rippled black as the wind ruffled it. There were reflections in the water, branches and a pale strip of sky. What a dream, she murmured; what a dream . . . But someone jostled her. She turned. She must go to Delia. Delia had cared. Delia had cared passionately. What was it she used to say – flinging out of the house, leaving them all for the Cause, for this man? Justice, Liberty? She must go to her. This would be the end of all her dreams. She turned and hailed a cab.

She leant over the flaps of the cab looking out. The streets they were driving through were horribly poor; and not only poor, she thought, but vicious. Here was the vice, the obscenity, the reality of London. It was lurid in the mixed evening light.

Lamps were being lit. Paper-boys were crying, Parnell . . . Parnell. He's dead, she said to herself, still conscious of the two worlds; one flowing in wide sweeps overhead, the other tip-tapping circumscribed upon the pavement. But here she was . . . She held up her hand. She stopped the cab opposite a little row of posts in an alley. She got out and made her way into the Square.

The sound of the traffic was dulled. It was very silent here. In the October afternoon, with dead leaves falling, the old faded Square looked dingy and decrepit and full of mist. The houses were let out in offices, to societies, to people whose names were pinned up on the door-posts. The whole neighbourhood seemed to her foreign and sinister. She came to the old Queen Anne doorway with its heavy carved eyebrows and pressed the bell at the top of six or seven bells. Names were written over them, sometimes only on visiting-cards. Nobody came. She pushed the door open and went in; she mounted the wooden stairs with carved banisters, that seemed to have been degraded from their past dignity. Jugs of milk with bills under them stood in the deep window-seats. Some of the panes were broken. Outside Delia's door, at the top, there was a milk-jug too, but it was empty. Her card was fixed by a drawing-pin to a panel. She knocked and waited. There was no sound. She turned the handle. The door was locked. She stood for a moment listening. A little window at the side gave on to the square. Pigeons crooned on the tree-tops. The traffic hummed far off; she could just hear paper-boys crying death . . . death . . . death. The leaves were falling. She turned and went downstairs.

She strolled along the streets. Children had chalked the pavement into squares; women leant from the upper windows, raking the street with a rapacious, dissatisfied stare. Rooms were let out to single gentlemen only. There were cards in them which said 'Furnished Apartments' or 'Bed and Breakfast'. She guessed at the life that went on behind those thick yellow curtains. This was the purlieus in which her sister lived, she thought, turning; she must often come back this way at night alone. Then she went back to the Square and climbed the stairs and rattled at the door again. But there was no sound within. She stood for a moment watching the leaves fall; she heard the paper-boys crying and the pigeons crooning in the tree-tops.

Take two coos, Taffy; take two coos, Taffy; tak . . . Then a lea
fell.

The traffic at Charing Cross thickened as the afternoon wore on. People on foot, people in cabs were being sucked in at the gates of the station. Men swung along at a great pace as if there were some demon in the station who would be enraged if they kept him waiting. But even so they paused and snatched a paper as they passed. The clouds parting and massing let the light shine and then veiled it. The mud, now dark brown, now liquid gold, was splashed up by the wheels and hooves, and in the general churn and uproar the shrill chatter of the birds on the eaves was silenced. The hansoms jingled and passed; jingled and passed. At last among all the jingling cabs came one in which sat a stout red-faced man holding a flower wrapped in tissue paper – the Colonel.

'Hi!' he cried as the cab passed the gates; and drove one hand through the trap-door in the roof. He leant out and a paper was thrust up at him.

'Parnell!' he exclaimed, as he fumbled for his glasses. 'Dead, by Jove!'

The cab trotted on. He read the news two or three times over. He's dead, he said, taking off his glasses. A shock of something like relief, of something that had a tinge of triumph in it, went through him as he leant back in the corner. Well, he said to himself, he's dead – that unscrupulous adventurer – that agitator who had done all the mischief, that man . . . Some feeling connected with his own daughter here formed in him; he could not say exactly what, but it made him frown. Anyhow he's dead now, he thought. How had he died? Had he killed himself? It wouldn't be surprising. . . . Anyhow he was dead and that was an end of it. He sat holding the paper crumpled in one hand, the flower wrapped in tissue paper in the other, as the cab drove down Whitehall. . . . One could respect him, he thought, as the cab passed the House of Commons, which was more than could be said for some of the other fellows . . . and there'd been a lot of nonsense talked about the divorce case. He looked out. The cab was driving near a certain street where he used to stop and look about him years ago. He turned and glanced down a street to the right. But a man in public life can't afford to do those

things, he thought. He gave a little nod as the cab passed on. And now she's written to ask me for money, he thought. The other chap had turned out, as he knew he would, a bad egg. She'd lost all her looks, he was thinking; she had grown very stout. Well, he could afford to be generous. He put on his glasses again and read the City news.

It would make no difference, Parnell's death, coming now, he thought. Had he lived, had the scandal died down – he looked up. The cab was going the long way round as usual. 'Left!' he shouted, 'Left!' as the driver, as they always did, took the wrong turning.

In the rather dark basement at Browne Street, the Italian manservant was reading the paper in his shirt sleeves, when the housemaid waltzed in carrying a hat.

'Look what she's given me!' she cried. To atone for the mess in the drawing-room, Lady Pargiter had given her a hat. 'Ain't I stylish?' she said, pausing in front of the glass with the great Italian hat that looked as if it were made of spun glass on one side of her head. And Antonio had to drop his paper and catch her round the waist from sheer gallantry, since she was no beauty, and her action was merely a parody of what he remembered in the hill towns of Tuscany. But a cab stopped in front of the railings; two legs stood still there, and he must detach himself, put on his jacket and go upstairs to answer the bell.

He takes his time, the Colonel thought, as he stood on the door-step waiting. The shock of the death had been absorbed almost; it still swept round in his system; but did not prevent him from thinking, as he stood there, that they had had the bricks re-pointed; but how had they money to spare, with the three boys to educate, and the two little girls? Eugénie was a clever woman of course; but he wished she would get a parlourmaid instead of these Italian dagoes who always seemed to be swallowing macaroni. Here the door opened, and as he went upstairs he thought he heard, from somewhere in the background, a shout of laughter.

He liked Eugénie's drawing-room, he thought, as he stood there waiting. It was very untidy. There was a litter of shavings from something that was being unpacked on the floor. They had been to Italy, he remembered. A looking-glass stood on the table. It was probably one of the things she had picked up there:

the sort of thing that people did pick up in Italy; an old glass covered with spots. He straightened his tie in front of it.

But I prefer a glass in which one can see oneself, he thought, turning away. There was the piano open; and the tea – he smiled – with the cup half full as usual; and branches stuck about the room, branches of withering red and yellow leaves. She liked flowers. He was glad he had remembered to bring her his usual gift. He held the flower wrapped in tissue paper in front of him. But why was the room so full of smoke? A gust blew in. Both windows in the back room were open, and the smoke was blowing in from the garden. Were they burning weeds, he wondered? He walked to the window and looked out. Yes, there they were – Eugénie and the two little girls. There was a bonfire. As he looked, Magdalena, the little girl who was his favourite, tossed a whole armful of dead leaves. She jerked them as high as she could, and the fire blazed up. A great fan of red flame flung out.

'That's dangerous!' he called out.

Eugénie pulled the children back. They were dancing with excitement. The other little girl, Sara, ducked under her mother's arm, seized another armful of leaves and flung them again. A great fan of red flame flung out. Then the Italian servant came and mentioned his name. He tapped on the window. Eugénie turned and saw him. She held the children back with one hand and raised the other in welcome.

'Stay where you are!' she cried. 'We're coming!'

A cloud of smoke blew straight at him; it made his eyes water, and he turned and sat down in the chair by the sofa. In another second she came, hurrying towards him with both her hands stretched out. He rose and took them.

'We're having a bonfire,' she said. Her eyes were glowing; her hair was looping down. 'That's why I'm all so blown-about,' she added, putting her hand to her head. She was untidy, but extremely handsome all the same, Abel thought. A fine large woman, growing ample, he noted as she shook hands; but it suited her. He admired that type more than the pink-and-white pretty Englishwoman. The flesh flowed over her like warm yellow wax; she had great dark eyes like a foreigner, and a nose with a ripple in it. He held out his camellia; his customary gift. She made a little exclamation as she took the flower from the tissue paper and sat down.

'How very good of you!' she said, and held it for a moment in front of her, and then did what he had often seen her do with a flower – put the stalk between her lips. Her movements charmed him as usual.

'Having a bonfire for the birthday?' he asked. . . . 'No, no, no,' he protested, 'I don't want tea.'

She had taken her cup, and sipped the cold tea that was left in it. As he watched her, some memory of the East came back to him; so women sat in hot countries in their doorways in the sun. But it was very cold at the moment with the window open and the smoke blowing in. He still had his newspaper in his hand; he laid it on the table.

'Seen the news?' he asked.

She put down her cup and slightly opened her large dark eyes. Immense reserves of emotion seemed to dwell in them. As she waited for him to speak, she raised her hand as if in expectation.

'Parnell,' said Abel briefly. 'He's dead.'

'Dead?' Eugénie echoed him. She let her hand fall dramatically.

'Yes. At Brighton. Yesterday.'

'Parnell is dead!' she repeated.

'So they say,' said the Colonel. Her emotion always made him feel more matter-of-fact; but he liked it. She took up the paper.

'Poor thing!' she exclaimed, letting it fall.

'Poor thing?' he repeated. Her eyes were full of tears. He was puzzled. Did she mean Kitty O'Shea? He hadn't thought of her.

'She ruined his career for him,' he said with a little snort.

'Ah, but how she must have loved him!' she murmured.

She drew her hand over her eyes. The Colonel was silent for a moment. Her emotion seemed to him out of all proportion to its object; but it was genuine. He liked it.

'Yes,' he said, rather stiffly. 'Yes, I suppose so.' Eugénie picked up the flower again and held it, twirling it. She was oddly absent-minded now and then, but he always felt at his ease with her. His body relaxed. He felt relieved of some obstruction in her presence.

'How people suffer! . . .' she murmured, looking at the flower. 'How they suffer, Abel!' she said. She turned and looked straight at him.

A great gust of smoke blew in from the other room.

'You don't mind the draught?' he asked, looking at the

window. She did not answer at once; she was twirling her flower. Then she roused herself and smiled.

'Yes, yes. Shut it!' she said with a wave of her hand. He went and shut the window. When he turned round, she had got up and was standing at the looking-glass, arranging her hair.

'We've had a bonfire for Maggie's birthday,' she murmured, looking at herself in the Venetian glass that was covered with spots. 'That's why, that's why—' she smoothed her hair and fixed the camellia in her dress. 'I'm so very—'

She put her head a little on one side as if to observe the effect of the flower in her dress. The Colonel sat down and waited. He glanced at his paper.

'They seem to be hushing things up,' he said.

'You don't mean—' Eugénie was beginning; but here the door opened and the children came in. Maggie, the elder, came first; the other little girl, Sara, hung back behind her.

'Hullo!' the Colonel exclaimed. 'Here they are!' He turned round. He was very fond of children. 'Many happy returns of the day to you, Maggie!' He felt in his pocket for the necklace that Crosby had done up in a cardboard box. Maggie came up to him to take it. Her hair had been brushed, and she was dressed in a stiff clean frock. She took the parcel and undid it; she held the blue-and-gold necklace dangling from her finger. For a moment the Colonel doubted whether she liked it. It looked a little garish as she held it dangling in her hand. And she was silent. Her mother at once supplied the words she should have spoken.

'How lovely, Maggie! How perfectly lovely!' Maggie held the beads in her hand and said nothing.

'Thank Uncle Abel for the lovely necklace,' her mother prompted her.

'Thank you for the necklace, Uncle Abel,' said Maggie. She spoke directly and accurately, but the Colonel felt another twinge of doubt. A pang of disappointment out of all proportion to its object came over him. Her mother, however, fastened it round her neck. Then she turned away to her sister, who was peeping from behind a chair.

'Come, Sara,' said her mother. 'Come and say how-d'you-do.'

She held out her hand partly to coax the little girl, partly, Abel guessed, in order to conceal the very slight deformity that always made him uncomfortable. She had been dropped when

she was a baby; one shoulder was slightly higher than the other; it made him feel squeamish; he could not bear the least deformity in a child. It did not affect her spirits, however. She skipped up to him, whirling round on her toe, and kissed him lightly on the cheek. Then she tugged at her sister's frock, and they both rushed away into the back room laughing.

'They are going to admire your lovely present, Abel,' said Eugénie. 'How you spoil them! – and me too,' she added, touching the camellia on her breast.

'I hope she liked it?' he asked. Eugénie did not answer him. She had taken up the cup of cold tea again and was sipping it in her indolent Southern manner.

'And now,' she said, leaning back comfortably, 'tell me all your news.'

The Colonel, too, lay back in his chair. He pondered for a moment. What was his news? Nothing occurred to him on the spur of the moment. With Eugénie, too, he always wanted to make a little splash; she put a shine on things. While he hesitated, she began:

'We've been having a wonderful time in Venice! I took the children. That's why we're all so brown. We had rooms not on the Grand Canal – I hate the Grand Canal – but just off it. Two weeks of blazing sun; and the colours' – she hesitated – 'marvellous!' she exclaimed, 'marvellous!' She threw out her hand. She had gestures of extraordinary significance. That's how she rigs things up, he thought. But he liked her for it.

He had not been to Venice for years.

'Any pleasant people there?' he asked.

'Not a soul,' she said. 'Not a soul. No one except a dreadful Miss—. One of those women who make one ashamed of one's country,' she said energetically.

'I know 'em,' he chuckled.

'But coming back from the Lido in the evening,' she resumed, 'with the clouds above and the water below – we had a balcony; we used to sit there.' She paused.

'Was Digby with you?' the Colonel asked.

'No, poor Digby. He took his holiday earlier, in August. He was up in Scotland with the Lasswades shooting. It does him good, you know.' There she goes, rigging thing's up again, he thought.

But she resumed.

'Now tell me about the family. Martin and Eleanor, Hugh and Milly, Morris and ...' She hesitated; he suspected that she had forgotten the name of Morris' wife.

'Celia,' he said. He stopped. He wanted to tell her about Mira. But he told her about the family: Hugh and Milly; Morris and Celia. And Edward.

'They seem to think a lot of him at Oxford,' he said gruffly. He was very proud of Edward.

'And Delia?' said Eugénie. She glanced at the paper. The Colonel at once lost his affability. He looked glum and formidable, like an old bull with his head down, she thought.

'Perhaps it will bring her to her senses,' he said sternly. They were silent for a moment. There were shouts of laughter from the garden.

'Oh those children!' she exclaimed. She rose and went to the window. The Colonel followed her. The children had stolen back into the garden. The bonfire was burning fiercely. A clear pillar of flame rose in the middle of the garden. The little girls were laughing and shouting as they danced round it. A shabby old man, something like a decayed groom to look at, stood there with a rake in his hand. Eugénie flung up the window and cried out. But they went on dancing. The Colonel leant out too; they looked like wild creatures with their hair flying. He would have liked to go down and jump over the bonfire, but he was too old. The flames leapt high – clear gold, bright red.

'Bravo!' he cried, clapping his hands. 'Bravo!'

'Little demons!' said Eugénie. She was as much excited as they were, he observed. She leant out of the window and cried to the old man with the rake:

'Make it blaze! Make it blaze!'

But the old man was raking out the fire. The sticks were scattered. The flames had sunk.

The old man pushed the children away.

'Well, that's over,' said Eugénie, heaving a sigh. She turned. Someone had come into the room.

'Oh, Digby, I never heard you!' she exclaimed. Digby stood there with a case in his hands.

'Hullo, Digby!' said Abel, shaking hands.

'What's all this smoke?' said Digby, looking round him.

He's aged a bit, Abel thought. There he stood in his frock coat

with the top buttons undone. His coat was a little threadbare; his hair was white on top. But he was very handsome; beside him the Colonel felt large, weather-beaten and rough. He was a little ashamed that he had been caught leaning out of the window clapping his hands. He looks older, he thought, as they stood side by side; yet he's five years younger than I am. He was a distinguished man in his way; the top of his tree; a knight and all the rest of it. But he's not as rich as I am, he remembered with satisfaction; for he had always been the failure of the two.

'You look so tired, Digby!' Eugénie exclaimed, sitting down. 'He ought to take a real holiday,' she said, turning to Abel. 'I wish you'd tell him so.' Digby brushed away a white thread that had stuck to his trousers. He coughed slightly. The room was full of smoke.

'What's all this smoke for?' he asked his wife.

'We've been having a bonfire for Maggie's birthday,' she said as if excusing herself.

'Oh yes,' he said. Abel was irritated; Maggie was his favourite; her father ought to have remembered her birthday.

'Yes,' said Eugénie, turning to Abel again, 'he lets everybody else take a holiday, but he never takes one himself. And then, when he'd done a full day's work at the office, he comes back with his bag full of papers—' She pointed at the bag.

'You shouldn't work after dinner,' said Abel. 'That's a bad habit.' Digby did look a bit off-colour, he thought. Digby brushed aside this feminine effusiveness.

'Seen the news?' he said to his brother, indicating the paper.

'Yes. By Jove!' said Abel. He liked talking politics with his brother, though he slightly resented his official airs as if he could say more but must not. And then it's all in the papers the day after, he thought. Still they always talked politics. Eugénie lying back in her corner always let them talk; she never interrupted. But at length she got up and began tidying the litter that had fallen from the packing-case. Digby stopped what he was saying and watched her. He was looking at the glass.

'Like it?' said Eugénie, with her hand on the frame.

'Yes,' said Digby; but there was a hint of criticism in his voice. 'Quite a pretty one.'

'It's only for my bedroom,' she said quickly. Digby watched her stuffing the bits of paper into the box.

'Remember,' he said, 'we're dining with the Chathams t
night.'

'I know.' She touched her hair again. 'I shall have to mak
myself tidy,' she said. Who were 'the Chathams?' Abel wo
dered. Bigwigs, mandarins, he supposed half contemptuousl
They moved a great deal in that world. He took it as a hint th
he should go. They had come to the end of what they had to sa
to each other – he and Digby. He still hoped, however, that h
might talk with Eugénie alone.

'About this African business—' he began, bethinking him c
another question – when the children came in; they had com
to say good-night. Maggie was wearing his necklace and i
looked very pretty, he thought, or was it she who looked s
pretty? But their frocks, their clean blue and pink frocks, wer
crumpled; they were smudged with the sooty London leave
that they had been holding in their arms.

'Grubby little ruffians!' he said, smiling at them. 'Wh
d'you wear your best clothes to play in the garden?' said Si
Digby, as he kissed Maggie. He said it jokingly, but ther
was a hint of disapproval in his tones. Maggie made no answe
Her eyes were riveted on the camellia that her mothe
wore in the front of her dress. She went up and stood lookin
at her.

'And you – what a little sweep!' said Sir Digby, pointing t
Sara.

'It's Maggie's birthday,' said Eugénie, holding out her arn
again as if to protect the little girl.

'That is a reason, I should have thought,' said Sir Digby, sur
veying his daughters, 'to – er – to – er – reform one's habits.' H
stumbled, trying to make his sentence sound playful; but i
turned out as it generally did when he talked to the children
lame and rather pompous.

Sara looked at her father as if she were considering him.

'To – er – to – er – reform one's habits,' she repeated. Emptiec
of all meaning, she had got the rhythm of his words exactly
The effect was somehow comic. The Colonel laughed; bu
Digby, he felt, was annoyed. He only patted Sara on the heac
when she came to say good-night; but he kissed Maggie as she
passed him.

'Had a nice birthday?' he said, pulling her to him. Abel made
it an excuse to go.

'But there is no need for you to go yet, Abel?' Eugénie protested as he held out his hand.

She kept hold of his hand as if to prevent him from going. What did she mean? Did she want him to stay, did she want him to go? Her eyes, her large dark eyes, were ambiguous.

'But you're dining out?' he said.

'Yes,' she replied, letting his hand fall, and as she said no more there was nothing for it, he supposed – he must take himself off.

'Oh, I can find my way out alone,' he said as he left the room.

He went downstairs rather slowly. He felt depressed and disappointed. He had not seen her alone; he had not told her anything. Perhaps he never would tell anybody anything. After all, he thought as he went downstairs, slowly, heavily, it was his own affair. it didn't matter to anybody else. One must burn one's own smoke, he thought as he took his hat. He glanced round.

Yes . . . the house was full of pretty things. He looked vaguely at a great crimson chair with gilt claws that stood in the hall. He envied Digby his house, his wife, his children. He was getting old, he felt. All his children were grown-up; they had left him. He paused on the door-step and looked out into the street. It was quite dark; lamps were lit; the autumn was drawing in; and as he marched up the dark windy street, now spotted with raindrops, a puff of smoke blew full in his face; and leaves were falling.

1907

It was midsummer; and the nights were hot. The moon, falli
on water, made it white, inscrutable, whether deep or shallo
But where the moonlight fell on solid objects it gave them
burnish and a silver plating, so that even the leaves in count
roads seemed varnished. All along the silent country roads lea
ing to London carts plodded; the iron reins fixed in the ir
hands, for vegetables, fruit, flowers travelled slowly. Heap
high with round crates of cabbage, cherries, carnations, th
looked like caravans piled with the goods of tribes migrating
search of water, driven by enemies to seek new pasturage. C
they plodded, down this road, that road, keeping close to t
kerb. Even the horses, had they been blind, could have heard t
hum of London in the distance; and the drivers, dozing, yet sa
through half shut eyes the fiery gauze of the eternally burni
city. At dawn, at Covent Garden, they laid down their burden
tables and trestles, even the cobbles were frilled as with son
celestrial laundry with cabbages, cherries and carnations.

All the windows were open. Music sounded. From behi
crimson curtains, rendered semi-transparent and sometim
blowing wide came the sound of the eternal waltz – After t
ball is over, after the dance is done – like a serpent that swa
lowed its own tail, since the ring was complete from Ha
mersmith to Shoreditch. Over and over again it was repeated b
trombones outside public houses; errand boys whistled it; ban
inside private rooms where people were dancing played i
There they sat at little tables at Wapping in the romantic In
that overhung the river, between timber warehouses whe
barges were moored; and here again in Mayfair. Each table ha
its lamp; its canopy of tight red silk, and the flowers that ha
sucked damp from the earth that noon relaxed and spread the
petals in vases. Each table had its pyramid of strawberries, i
pale plump quail; and Martin, after India, after Africa, found
exciting to talk to a girl with bare shoulders, to a woman i
descent with green beetles wings in her hair in a manner th
the waltz condoned and half concealed under its amorou

blandishments. Did it matter what one said? For she looked over her shoulder, only half listening, as a man came in wearing decorations, and a lady, in black with diamonds, beckoned him to a private corner.

As the night wore on a tender blue light lay on the market carts still plodding close to the kerb, past Westminster, past the yellow round clocks, the coffee stalls and the statues that stood there in the dawn holding so stiffly their rods or rolls of paper. And the scavengers followed after, sluicing the pavements. Cigarette ends, little bits of silver paper, orange peel – all the litter of the day was swept off the pavement and still the carts plodded, and the cabs trotted, indefatigably, along the dowdy pavements of Kensington, under the sparkling lights of Mayfair, carrying ladies with high head dresses and gentlemen in white waistcoats along the hammered dry roads which looked in the moonlight as if they were plated with silver.

'Look!' said Eugénie as the cab trotted over the bridge in the summer twilight. 'Isn't that lovely?'

She waved her hand at the water. They were crossing the Serpentine; but her exclamation was only an aside; she was listening to what her husband was saying. Their daughter Magdalena was with them; and she looked where her mother pointed. There was the Serpentine, red in the setting sun; the trees grouped together, sculptured, losing their detail; and the ghostly architecture of the little bridge, white at the end, composed the scene. The lights – the sun-light and the artificial light – were strangely mixed.

'... of course it's put the Government in a fix,' Sir Digby was saying. 'But then that's what he wants.'

'Yes ... he'll make a name for himself, that young man,' said Lady Pargiter.

The cab passed over the bridge. It entered the shadow of the trees. Now it left the Park and joined the long line of cabs, taking people in evening dress to plays, to dinner-parties, that was streaming towards the Marble Arch. The light grew more and more artificial; yellower and yellower. Eugénie leant across and touched something on her daughter's dress. Maggie looked up. She had thought that they were still talking politics.

'So,' said her mother, arranging the flower in front of her dress. She put her head a little on one side and looked at her daughter approvingly. Then she gave a sudden laugh and threw her hand

out. 'D'you know what made me so late?' she said. 'That imp Sally . . .'

But her husband interrupted her. He had caught sight of an illuminated clock.

'We shall be late,' he said.

'But eight-fifteen means eight-thirty,' said Eugénie as they turned down a side street.

All was silent in the house at Browne Street. A ray from the street lamp fell through the fanlight and, rather capriciously, li up a tray of glasses on the hall table; a top hat; and a chair with gilt paws. The chair, standing empty, as if waiting for someone, had a look of ceremony; as if it stood on the cracked floor of some Italian ante-room. But all was silent. Antonio, the man-servant, was asleep; Mollie, the housemaid, was asleep; down-stairs in the basement a door flapped to and fro – otherwise all was silent.

Sally in her bedroom at the top of the house turned on her side and listened intently. She thought she heard the front door click. A burst of dance music came in through the open window and made it impossible to hear.

She sat up in bed and looked out through the slit of the blind. Through the gap she could see a slice of the sky; then roofs; then the tree in the garden; then the backs of houses opposite standing in a long row. One of the houses was brilliantly lit and from the long open windows came dance music. They were waltzing. She saw shadows twirling across the blind. It was impossible to read; impossible to sleep. First there was the music; then a burst of talk; then people came out into the garden; voices chattered, then the music began again.

It was a hot summer's night, and though it was late, the whole world seemed to be alive; the rush of traffic sounded distant but incessant.

A faded brown book lay on her bed; as if she had been reading. But it was impossible to read; impossible to sleep. She lay back on the pillow with her hands behind her head.

'And he says,' she murmured, 'the world is nothing but . . .' She paused. What did he say? Nothing but thought, was it? she asked herself as if she had already forgotten. Well, since it was impossible to read and impossible to sleep, she would let herself

be thought. It was easier to act things than to think them. Legs, body, hands, the whole of her must be laid out passively to take part in this universal process of thinking which the man said was the world living. She stretched herself out. Where did thought begin?

In the feet? she asked. There they were, jutting out under the single sheet. They seemed separated, very far away. She closed her eyes. Then against her will something in her hardened. It was impossible to act thought. She became something; a root; lying sunk in the earth; veins seemed to thread the cold mass; the tree put forth branches; the branches had leaves.

'—the sun shines through the leaves,' she said, waggling her finger. She opened her eyes in order to verify the sun on the leaves and saw the actual tree standing out there in the garden. Far from being dappled with sunlight, it had no leaves at all. She felt for a moment as if she had been contradicted. For the tree was black, dead black.

She leant her elbow on the sill and looked out at the tree. A confused clapping sound came from the room where they were having the dance. The music had stopped; people began to come down the iron staircase into the garden which was marked out with blue and yellow lamps dotted along the wall. The voices grew louder. More people came and more people came. The dotted square of green was full of the flowing pale figures of women in evening dress; of the upright black-and-white figures of men in evening dress. She watched them moving in and out. They were talking and laughing; but they were too far off for her to hear what they were saying. Sometimes a single word or a laugh rose above the rest, and then there was a confused babble of sound. In their own garden all was empty and silent. A cat slid stealthily along the top of a wall; stopped; and then went on again as if drawn on some secret errand. Another dance struck up.

'Over again, over and over again!' she exclaimed impatiently. The air, laden with the curious dry smell of London earth, puffed in her face, blowing the blind out. Stretched flat on her bed, she saw the moon; it seemed immensely high above her. Little vapours were moving across the surface. Now they parted and she saw engravings chased over the white disc. What were they, she wondered – mountains? valleys? And if valleys, she said to herself half closing her eyes, then white trees; then icy

hollows, and nightingales, two nightingales calling to eac other, calling and answering each other across the valleys. Th waltz music took the words 'calling and answering each othe and flung them out; but as it repeated the same rhythm agai and again, it coarsened them, it destroyed them. The danc music interfered with everything. At first exciting, then i became boring and finally intolerable. Yet it was only twent minutes to one.

Her lip raised itself, like that of a horse that is going to bite The little brown book was dull. She reached her hand above he head and took down another book from the shelf of battere books without looking at it. She opened the book at random but her eye was caught by one of the couples who were stil sitting out in the garden though the others had gone in. Wha were they saying, she wondered? There was something gleam ing in the grass, and, as far as she could see, the black-and-whit figure stooped and picked it up.

'And as he picks it up,' she murmured, looking out, 'he says t the lady beside him: Behold, Miss Smith, what I have found o the grass – a fragment of my heart; of my broken heart, he says I have found it in the grass; and I wear it on my breast' – she hummed the words in time to the melancholy waltz music 'my broken heart, this broken glass, for love—' she paused an glanced at the book. On the fly-leaf was written:

'Sara Pargiter from her Cousin Edward Pargiter.'

'. . . for love,' she concluded, 'is best.'

She turned to the title-page.

'The Antigone of Sophocles, done into English verse b Edward Pargiter,' she read.

Once more she looked out of the window. The couple ha moved. They were going up the iron staircase. She watche them. They went into the ballroom. 'And suppose in the middl of the dance,' she murmured, 'she takes it out; and looks at i and says, "What is this?" and it's only a piece of broken glass of broken glass. . . .' She looked down at the book again.

'The Antigone of Sophocles,' she read. The book was brand new; it cracked as she opened it; this was the first time she ha opened it.

'The Antigone of Sophocles, done into English verse by Edward Pargiter,' she read again. He had given it her in Oxford one hot afternoon when they had been trailing through chapels

and libraries. 'Trailing and wailing,' she hummed, turning over the pages, 'and he said to me, getting up from the low armchair, and brushing his hand through his hair' – she glanced out of the window – ' "my wasted youth, my wasted youth".' The waltz was now at its most intense, its most melancholy. 'Taking in his hand,' she hummed in time to it, 'this broken glass, this faded heart, he said to me ...' Here the music stopped; there was a sound of clapping; the dancers once more came out into the garden.

She skipped through the pages. At first she read a line or two at random; then, from the litter of broken words, scenes rose, quickly, inaccurately, as she skipped. The unburied body of a murdered man lay like a fallen tree-trunk, like a statue, with one foot stark in the air. Vultures gathered. Down they flopped on the silver sand. With a lurch, with a reel, the top-heavy birds came waddling; with a flap of the grey throat swinging, they hopped – she beat her hand on the counterpane as she read – to that lump there. Quick, quick, quick with repeated jerks they struck the mouldy flesh. Yes. She glanced at the tree outside in the garden. The unburied body of the murdered man lay on the sand. Then in a yellow cloud came whirling – who? She turned the page quickly. Antigone? She came whirling out of the dust-cloud to where the vultures were reeling and flung white sand over the blackened foot. She stood there letting fall white dust over the blackened foot. Then behold! there were more clouds; dark clouds; the horsemen leapt down; she was seized; her wrists were bound with withies; and they bore her, thus bound – where?

There was a roar of laughter from the garden. She looked up. Where did they take her? she asked. The garden was full of people. She could not hear a word that they were saying. The figures were moving in and out.

'To the estimable court of the respected ruler?' she murmured, picking up a word or two at random, for she was still looking out into the garden. The man's name was Creon. He buried her. It was a moonlight night. The blades of the cactuses were sharp silver. The man in the loincloth gave three sharp taps with his mallet on the brick. She was buried alive. The tomb was a brick mound. There was just room for her to lie straight out. Straight out in a brick tomb, she said. And that's the end, she yawned, shutting the book.

She laid herself out, under the cold smooth sheets, and pulled the pillow over her ears. The one sheet and the one blanket fitted softly round her. At the bottom of the bed was a long stretch of cool fresh mattress. The sound of the dance music became dulled. Her body dropped suddenly; then reached ground. A dark wing brushed her mind, leaving a pause; a blank space. Everything – the music, the voices – became stretched and generalized. The book fell on the floor. She was asleep.

'It's a lovely night,' said the girl who was going up the iron steps with her partner. She rested her hand on the balustrade. It felt very cold. She looked up; a slice of yellow light lay round the moon. It seemed to laugh round it. Her partner looked up too, and then mounted another step without saying anything for he was shy.

'Going to the match tomorrow?' he said stiffly, for they scarcely knew each other.

'If my brother gets off in time to take me,' she said, and went up another step too. Then, as they entered the ballroom, he gave her a little bow and left her; for his partner was waiting.

The moon which was now clear of clouds lay in a bare space as if the light had consumed the heaviness of the clouds and left a perfectly clear pavement, a dancing ground for revelry. For some time the dappled iridescence of the sky remained unbroken. Then there was a puff of wind; and a little cloud crossed the moon.

There was a sound in the bedroom. Sara turned over.

'Who's that?' she murmured. She sat up and rubbed her eyes.

It was her sister. She stood at the door, hesitating. 'Asleep?' she said in a low voice.

'No,' said Sara. She rubbed her eyes. 'I'm awake,' she said, opening them.

Maggie came across the room and sat down on the edge of the bed. The blind was blowing out; the sheets were slipping off the bed. She felt dazed for a moment. After the ballroom, it looked so untidy. There was a tumbler with a toothbrush in it on the wash-stand; the towel was crumpled on the towel-horse; and a book had fallen on the floor. She stooped and picked up the book. As she did so, the music burst out down the street. She held back the blind. The women in pale dresses, the men in black and white, were crowding up the stairs into the ball-

room. Snatches of talk and laughter were blown across the garden.

'Is there a dance?' she asked.

'Yes. Down the street,' said Sara.

Maggie looked out. At this distance the music sounded romantic, mysterious, and the colours flowed over each other, neither pink nor white nor blue.

Maggie stretched herself and unpinned the flower that she was wearing. It was drooping; the white petals were stained with black marks. She looked out of the window again. The mixture of lights was very odd; one leaf was a lurid green; another was a bright white. The branches crossed each other at different levels. Then Sally laughed.

'Did anybody give you a piece of glass,' she said, 'saying to you, Miss Pargiter . . . my broken heart?'

'No,' said Maggie, 'why should they?' The flower fell off her lap on to the floor.

'I was thinking,' said Sara. 'The people in the garden . . .'

She waved her hand at the window. They were silent for a moment, listening to the dance music.

'And who did you sit next?' Sara asked after a time.

'A man in gold lace,' said Maggie.

'In gold lace?' Sara repeated.

Maggie was silent. She was getting used to the room: the discrepancy between this litter and the shiny ballroom was leaving her. She envied her sister lying in bed with the window open and the breeze blowing in.

'Because he was going to a party,' she said. She paused. Something had caught her eye. A branch swayed up and down in the little breeze. Maggie held the blind so that the window was uncurtained. Now she could see the whole sky, and the houses and the branches in the garden.

'It's the moon,' she said. It was the moon that was making the leaves white. They both looked at the moon, which shone like a silver coin, perfectly polished, very sharp and hard.

'But if they don't say O my broken heart,' said Sara, 'what do they say, at parties?'

Maggie flicked off a white fleck that had stuck to her arm from her gloves.

'Some people say one thing,' she said, getting up, 'and some people say another.'

She picked up the little brown book which lay on th counterpane and smoothed out the bedclothes. Sara took th book out of her hand.

'This man,' she said, tapping the ugly little brown volum 'says the world's nothing but thought, Maggie.'

'Does he?' said Maggie, putting the book on the wash-stand. I was a device, she knew, to keep her standing there, talking.

'D'you think it's true?' Sara asked.

'Possibly,' said Maggie, without thinking what she was sayin She put out her hand to draw the curtain.

'The world's nothing but thought, does he say?' she repeate holding the curtain apart.

She had been thinking something of the kind when the ca crossed the Serpentine; when her mother interrupted her. Sh had been thinking, Am I that, or am I this? Are we one, or ar we separate – something of the kind.

'Then what about trees and colours?' she said, turning round.

'Trees and colours?' Sara repeated.

'Would there be trees if we didn't see them?' said Maggie.

'What's "I"? . . . "I" . . .' She stopped. She did not know wha she meant. She was talking nonsense.

'Yes,' said Sara. 'What's "I"?' She held her sister tight by th skirt, whether she wanted to prevent her from going, o whether she wanted to argue the question.

'What's "I"?' she repeated.

But there was a rustling outside the door and her mothe came in.

'Oh my dear children!' she exclaimed, 'still out of bed? Stil talking?'

She came across the room, beaming, glowing, as if she wer still under the influence of the party. Jewels flashed on her nec and her arms. She was extraordinarily handsome. She glance round her.

'And the flower's on the floor, and everything's so untidy,' sh said. She picked up the flower that Maggie had dropped and pu it to her lips.

'Because I was reading, Mama, because I was waiting,' sai Sara. She took her mother's hand and stroked the bare arm. Sh imitated her mother's manner so exactly that Maggie smiled They were the very opposite of each other – Lady Pargiter s

sumptuous; Sally so angular. But it's worked, she thought to herself, as Lady Pargiter allowed herself to be pulled down on to the bed. The imitation had been perfect.

'But you must go to sleep, Sal,' she protested. 'What did the doctor say? Lie straight, lie still, he said.' She pushed her back on to the pillows.

'I am lying straight and still,' said Sara. 'Now' – she looked up at her – 'tell me about the party.'

Maggie stood upright in the window. She watched the couples coming down the iron staircase. Soon the garden was full of pale whites and pinks, moving in and out. She half heard them behind her talking about the party.

'It was a very nice party,' her mother was saying.

Maggie looked out of the window. The square of the garden was filled with differently tinted colours. They seemed to ripple one over the other until they entered the angle where the light from the house fell, when they suddenly turned to ladies and gentlemen in full evening dress.

'No fish-knives?' she heard Sara saying.

She turned.

'Who was the man I sat next?' she asked.

'Sir Matthew Mayhew,' said Lady Pargiter.

'Who is Sir Matthew Mayhew?' said Maggie.

'A most distinguished man, Maggie!' said her mother, flinging her hand out.

'A most distinguished man,' Sara echoed her.

'But he is,' Lady Pargiter repeated, smiling at her daughter whom she loved, perhaps because of her shoulder.

'It was a great honour to sit next him, Maggie,' she continued. 'A great honour,' she said reprovingly. She paused, as if she saw a little scene. She looked up.

'And then,' she resumed, 'when Mary Palmer says to me, Which is your daughter? I see Maggie, miles away, at the other end of the room, talking to Martin, whom she might have met every day of her life in an omnibus!'

Her words were stressed so that they seemed to rise and fall. She emphasized the rhythm still further by tapping with her fingers on Sally's bare arm.

'But I don't see Martin every day,' Maggie protested.

'I haven't seen him since he came back from Africa.' Her mother interrupted her.

'But you don't go to parties, my dear Maggie, to talk to your own cousins. You go to parties to—'

Here the dance music crashed out. The first chords seemed possessed of frantic energy, as if they were summoning the dancers imperiously to return. Lady Pargiter stopped in the middle of her sentence. She sighed; her body seemed to become indolent and suave. The heavy lids lowered themselves slightly over her large dark eyes. She swayed her head slowly in time to the music.

'What's that they're playing?' she murmured. She hummed the tune, beating time with her hand. 'Something I used to dance to.'

'Dance it now, Mama,' said Sara.

'Yes, Mama. Show us how you used to dance,' Maggie urged her.

'But without a partner—?' Lady Pargiter protested.

Maggie pushed a chair away.

'Imagine a partner,' Sara urged her.

'Well,' said Lady Pargiter. She rose. 'It was something like this,' she said. She paused; she held her skirt out with one hand; she slightly crooked the other in which she held the flower; she twirled round and round in the space which Maggie had cleared. She moved with extraordinary stateliness. All her limbs seemed to bend and flow in the lilt and the curve of the music; which became louder and clearer as she danced to it. She circled in and out among the chairs and tables and then, as the music stopped, 'There!' she exclaimed. Her body seemed to fold and close itself together as she sighed 'There!' and sank all in one movement on the edge of the bed.

'Wonderful!' Maggie exclaimed. Her eyes rested on her mother with admiration.

'Nonsense,' Lady Pargiter laughed, panting slightly. 'I'm much too old to dance now; but when I was young; when I was your age—' She sat there panting.

'You danced out of the house on to the terrace and found a little note folded in your bouquet—' said Sara, stroking her mother's arm. 'Tell us that story, Mama.'

'Not tonight,' said Lady Pargiter. 'Listen – there's the clock striking!'

Since the Abbey was so near, the sound of the hour filled the room; softly, tumultuously, as if it were a flurry of soft sighs

hurrying one on top of another, yet concealing something hard. Lady Pargiter counted. It was very late.

'I'll tell you the true story one of these days,' she said as she bent to kiss her daughter good-night.

'Now! Now!' cried Sara, holding her fast.

'No, not now – not now!' Lady Pargiter laughed, snatching away her hand. 'There's Papa calling me!'

They heard footsteps in the passage outside, and then Sir Digby's voice at the door.

'Eugénie! It's very late, Eugénie!' they heard him say.

'Coming!' she cried. 'Coming!'

Sara caught her by the train of her dress. 'You haven't told us the story of the bouquet, Mamma!' she cried.

'Eugénie!' Sir Digby repeated. His voice sounded peremptory. 'Have you locked—'

'Yes, yes, yes,' said Eugénie. 'I will tell you the true story another time,' she said, freeing herself from her daughter's grasp. She kissed them both quickly and went out of the room.

'She won't tell us,' said Maggie, picking up her gloves. She spoke with some bitterness.

They listened to the voices talking in the passage. They could hear their father's voice. He was expostulating. His voice sounded querulous and cross.

'Pirouetting up and down with his sword between his legs; with his opera hat under his arm and his sword between his legs,' said Sara, pummelling her pillows viciously.

The voices went further away, downstairs.

'Who was the note from, d'you think?' said Maggie. She paused, looking at her sister burrowing into her pillows.

'The note? What note?' said Sara. 'Oh, the note in the bouquet. I don't remember,' she said. She yawned.

Maggie shut the window and pulled the curtain but she left a chink of light.

'Pull it tight, Maggie,' said Sara irritably. 'Shut out that din.'

She curled herself up with her back to the window. She had raised a hump of pillow against her head as if to shut out the dance music that was still going on. She pressed her face into a cleft of the pillows. She looked like a chrysalis wrapped round in the sharp white folds of the sheet. Only the tip of her nose was visible. Her hip and her feet jutted out at the end of the bed

covered by a single sheet. She gave a profound sigh that was half a snore; she was asleep already.

Maggie went along the passage. Then she saw that there were lights in the hall beneath. She stopped and looked down over the banister. The hall was lit up. She could see the great Italian chair with the gilt claws that stood in the hall. Her mother had thrown her evening cloak over it, so that it fell in soft golden folds over the crimson cover. She could see a tray with whisky and a soda-water syphon on the hall table. Then she heard the voices of her father and mother as they came up the kitchen stairs. They had been down in the basement; there had been a burglary up the street; her mother had promised to have a new lock put on the kitchen door but had forgotten. She could hear her father say:

'... they'd melt it down; we should never get it back again.'

Maggie went on a few steps upstairs.

'I'm so sorry, Digby,' Eugénie said as they came into the hall. 'I will tie a knot in my handkerchief; I will go directly after breakfast tomorrow morning. ... Yes,' she said, gathering her cloak in her arms, 'I will go myself, and I will say "I've had enough of your excuses, Mr Toye. No, Mr Toye, you have deceived me once too often. And after all these years!" '

Then there was a pause. Maggie could hear soda-water squirted into a tumbler; the chink of a glass; and then the lights went out.

1908

It was March and the wind was blowing. But it was not 'blowing'. It was scraping, scourging. It was so cruel. So unbecoming. Not merely did it bleach faces and raise red spots on noses; it tweaked up skirts; showed stout legs; made trousers reveal skeleton shins. There was no roundness, no fruit in it. Rather it was like the curve of a scythe which cuts, not corn, usefully; but destroys, revelling in sheer sterility. With one blast it blew out colour – even a Rembrandt in the National Gallery, even a solid ruby in a Bond Street window: one blast and they were gone. Had it any breeding place it was in the Isle of Dogs among tin cans lying beside a workhouse drab on the banks of a polluted city. It tossed up rotten leaves, gave them another span of degraded existence; scorned, derided them, yet had nothing to put in the place of the scorned, the derided. Down they fell. Uncreative, unproductive, yelling its joy in destruction, its power to peel off the bark, the bloom, and show the bare bone, it paled every window; drove old gentlemen further and further into the leather smelling recesses of clubs; and old ladies to sit eyeless, leather cheeked, joyless among the tassels and antimacassars of their bedrooms and kitchens. Triumphing in its wantonness it emptied the streets; swept flesh before it; and coming smack against a dust cart standing outside the Army and Navy Stores, scattered along the pavement a litter of old envelopes; twists of hair; papers already blood smeared, yellow smeared, smudged with print and sent them scudding to plaster legs, lamp posts, pillar boxes, and fold themselves frantically against area railings.

Matty Stiles, the caretaker, huddled in the basement of the house in Browne Street, looked up. There was a rattle of dust along the pavement. It worked its way under the doors, through the window frames; on to chests and dressers. But she didn't care. She was one of the unlucky ones. She had been thinking it was a safe job, sure to last the summer out anyhow. The lady was dead; the gentleman too. She had got the job through her

son the policeman. The house with its basement would never let this side of Christmas – so they told her. She had only to show parties round who came with orders to view from the agent. And she always mentioned the basement – how damp it was. 'Look at that stain on the ceiling.' There it was, sure enough. All the same, the party from China took a fancy to it. It suited him. he said. He had business in the city. She was one of the unlucky ones – after three months to turn out and lodge with her son in Pimlico.

A bell rang. Let him ring, ring, ring, she growled. She wasn't going to open the door any more. There he was standing on the door-step. She could see a pair of legs against the railing. Let him ring as much as he liked. The house was sold. Couldn't he see the notice on the board? Couldn't he read it? Hadn't he eyes? She huddled closer to the fire, which was covered with pale ash. She could see his legs there, standing on the door-step, between the canaries' cage and the dirty linen which she had been going to wash, but this wind made her shoulder ache cruel. Let him ring the house down, for all she cared.

Martin was standing there.

'Sold' was written on a strip of bright red paper pasted across the house-agent's board.

'Already!' said Martin. He had made a little circle to look at the house in Browne Street. And it was already sold. The red strip gave him a shock. It was sold already, and Digby had only been dead three months – Eugénie not much more than a year. He stood for a moment gazing at the black windows now grimed with dust. It was a house of character; built some time in the eighteenth century. Eugénie had been proud of it. And I used to like going there, he thought. But now an old newspaper was on the door-step; wisps of straw had caught in the railings; and he could see, for there were no blinds, into an empty room. A woman was peering up at him from behind the bars of a cage in the basement. It was no use ringing. He turned away. A feeling of something extinguished came over him as he went down the street.

It's a grimy, it's a sordid end, he thought; I used to enjoy going there. But he disliked brooding over unpleasant thoughts. What's the good of it? he asked himself.

'The King of Spain's daughter,' he hummed as he turned the corner, 'came to visit me ...'

'And how much longer,' he asked himself, pressing the bell, as he stood on the door-step of the house in Abercorn Terrace, 'is old Crosby going to keep me waiting?' The wind was very cold.

He stood there, looking at the buff-coloured front of the large, architecturally insignificant, but no doubt convenient family mansion in which his father and sister still lived. 'She takes her time nowadays,' he thought, shivering in the wind. But here the door opened, and Crosby appeared.

'Hello, Crosby!' he said.

She beamed on him so that her gold tooth showed. He was always her favourite, they said, and the thought pleased him today.

'How's the world treating you?' he asked, as he gave her his hat.

She was just the same – more shrivelled, more gnat-like, and her blue eyes were more prominent than ever.

'Feeling the rheumatics?' he asked, as she helped him off with his coat. She grinned, silently. He felt friendly; he was glad to find her much as usual. 'And Miss Eleanor?' he asked, as he opened the drawing-room door. The room was empty. She was not there. But she had been there, for there was a book on the table. Nothing had been changed he was glad to see. He stood in front of the fire and looked at his mother's picture. In the course of the past few years it had ceased to be his mother; it had become a work of art. But it was dirty.

There used to be a flower in the grass, he thought, peering into a dark corner: but now there was nothing but dirty brown paint. And what's she been reading? he wondered. He took the book that was propped up against the teapot and looked at it. 'Renan,' he read. 'Why Renan?' he asked himself, beginning to read as he waited.

'Mr Martin, Miss,' said Crosby, opening the study door, Eleanor looked round. She was standing by her father's chair with her hands full of long strips of newspaper cuttings, as if she had been reading them aloud. There was a chess-board in front of him; the chess-men were set out for a game; but he was lying back in his chair. He looked lethargic, and rather gloomy.

'Put 'em away. . . . Keep 'em safe somewhere,' he said, jerking his thumb at the cuttings. That was a sign that he had grown

very old, Eleanor thought – wanting newspaper cuttings kept. He had grown inert and ponderous after his stroke; there were red veins in his nose and in his cheeks. She too felt old, heavy and dull.

'Mr Martin's called,' Crosby repeated.

'Martin's come,' Eleanor said. Her father seemed not to hear. He sat still with his head sunk on his breast. 'Martin,' Eleanor repeated. 'Martin . . .'

Did he want to see him or did he not want to see him? She waited as if for some sluggish thought to rise. At last he gave a little grunt; but what it meant she was not certain.

'I'll send him in after tea,' she said. She paused for a moment. He roused himself and began fumbling with his chess-men. He still had courage, she observed with pride. He still insisted upon doing things for himself.

She went into the drawing-room and found Martin standing in front of the placid, smiling picture of their mother. He held a book in his hand.

'Why Renan?' he said as she came in. He shut the book and kissed her. 'Why Renan?' he repeated. She flushed slightly. It made her shy, for some reason, that he had found the book there, open. She sat down and laid the press cuttings on the tea-table.

'How's Papa?' he asked. She had lost something of her bright colour, he thought, glancing at her, and her hair had a tuft of grey in it.

'Rather gloomy,' she said, glancing at the press cuttings.

'I wonder,' she added, 'who writes that sort of thing?'

'What sort of thing?' said Martin. He picked up one of the crinkled strips and began reading it: ' ". . . an exceptionally able public servant . . . a man of wide interests . . ." Oh, Digby,' he said. 'Obituaries. I passed the house this afternoon,' he added. 'It's sold.'

'Already?' said Eleanor.

'It looked very shut-up and desolate,' he added. 'There was a dirty old woman in the basement.'

Eleanor took out a hairpin and began fraying the wick of the kettle. Martin watched her for a moment in silence.

'I liked going there,' he said at length. 'I liked Eugénie,' he added.

Eleanor paused.

'Yes . . .' she said doubtfully. She had never felt at her ease with her. 'She exaggerated,' she added.

'Well of course,' Martin laughed. He smiled, recalling some memory. 'She had less sense of truth than . . . that's no sort of use, Nell,' he broke off, irritated by her fumbling with the wick.

'Yes, yes,' she protested. 'It boils in time.'

She paused. Stretching out towards the tea-caddy, she measured the tea. 'One, two, three, four,' she counted.

She still used the nice old silver tea-caddy, he noticed, with the sliding lid. He watched her measuring the tea methodically – one, two, three, four. He was silent.

'We can't tell a lie to save our souls,' he said abruptly.

What makes him say that? Eleanor wondered.

'When I was with them in Italy—' she said aloud. But here the door opened and Crosby came in carrying some sort of dish. She left the door ajar and a dog pushed in after her.

'I mean—' Eleanor added; but she could not say what she meant with Crosby in the room fidgeting about.

'It's time Miss Eleanor got a new kettle,' said Martin, pointing to the old brass kettle, faintly engraved with a design of roses, which he had always hated.

'Crosby,' said Eleanor, still poking with her pin, 'doesn't hold with new inventions. Crosby won't trust herself in the Tube, will you, Crosby?'

Crosby grinned. They always spoke to her in the third person, because she never answered but only grinned. The dog snuffed at the dish she had just put down. 'Crosby's letting that beast get much too fat,' said Martin, pointing at the dog.

'That's what I'm always telling her,' said Eleanor.

'If I were you, Crosby,' said Martin, 'I'd cut down his meals and take him for a brisk run round the park every morning.' Crosby opened her mouth wide.

'Oh, Mr Martin!' she protested, shocked by his brutality into speech.

The dog followed her out of the room.

'Crosby's the same as ever,' said Martin.

Eleanor had lifted the lid of the kettle and was looking in. There were no bubbles on the water yet.

'Damn that kettle,' said Martin. He took up one of the newspaper cuttings and began to make it into a spill.

'No, no, Papa wants them kept,' said Eleanor. 'But he wasn't like that,' she said, laying her hand on the newspaper cuttings. 'Not in the least.'

'What was he like?' Martin asked.

Eleanor paused. She could see her uncle clearly in her mind's eye; he held his top-hat in his hand; he laid his hand on her shoulder as they stopped in front of some picture. But how could she describe him?

'He used to take me to the National Gallary,' she said.

'Very cultivated, of course,' said Martin. 'But he was such a damned snob.'

'Only on the surface,' said Eleanor.

'And always finding fault with Eugénie about little things,' Martin added.

'But think of living with her,' said Eleanor.

'That manner—' She threw her hand out; but not as Eugénie threw her hand out, Martin thought.

'I liked her,' he said. 'I liked going there.' He saw the untidy room; the piano open; the window open; a wind blowing the curtains, and his aunt coming forward with her arms open. 'What a pleasure, Martin! what a pleasure!' she would say. What had her private life been, he wondered – her love affairs? She must have had them – obviously, obviously.

'Wasn't there some story,' he began, 'about a letter?' He wanted to say, Didn't she have an affair with somebody? But it was more difficult to be open with his sister than with other women, because she treated him as if he were a small boy still. Had Eleanor ever been in love, he wondered, looking at her.

'Yes,' she said. 'There was a story—'

But here the electric bell rang sharply. She stopped.

'Papa,' she said. She half rose.

'No,' said Martin. 'I'll go.' He got up. 'I promised him a game of chess.'

'Thanks, Martin. He'll enjoy that,' said Eleanor with relief as he left the room, and she found herself alone.

She leant back in her chair. How terrible old age was, she thought; shearing off all one's faculties, one by one, but leaving something alive in the centre: leaving – she swept up the press cuttings – a game of chess, a drive in the park, and a visit from old General Arbuthnot in the evening.

It was better to die, like Eugénie and Digby, in the prime of life with all one's faculties about one. But he wasn't like that, she thought, glancing at the press cuttings. 'A man of singularly handsome presence ... shot, fished, and played golf.' No, not like that in the least. He had been a curious man; weak; sensitive; liking titles; liking pictures; and often depressed, she guessed, by his wife's exuberance. She pushed the cuttings away and took up her book. It was odd how different the same person seemed to two different people, she thought. There was Martin, liking Eugénie; and she, liking Digby. She began to read.

She always wanted to know about Christianity – how it began; what it meant, originally. God is love, The kingdom of Heaven is within us, sayings like that she thought, turning over the pages, what did they mean? The actual words were very beautiful. But who said them – when? Then the spout of the tea-kettle puffed steam at her and she moved it away. The wind was rattling the windows in the back room; it was bending the little bushes; they still had no leaves on them. It was what a man said under a fig tree, on a hill, she thought. And then another man wrote it down. But suppose that what that man says is just as false as what this man – she touched the press cuttings with her spoon – says about Digby? And here am I, she thought, looking at the china in the Dutch cabinet, in this drawing-room, getting a little spark from what someone said all those years ago – here it comes (the china was changing from blue to livid) skipping over all those mountains, all those seas. She found her place and began to read.

But a sound in the hall interrupted her. Was someone coming in? She listened. No, it was the wind. The wind was terrific. It pressed on the house; gripped it tight, then let it fall apart. Upstairs a door slammed; a window must be open in the bedroom above. A blind was tapping. It was difficult to fix her mind on Renan, She liked it, though. French she could read easily of course; and Italian; and a little German. But what vast gaps there were, what blank spaces, she thought leaning back in her chair, in her knowledge! How little she knew about anything. Take this cup for instance; she held it out in front of her. What was it made of? Atoms? And what were atoms, and how did they stick together? The smooth hard surface of the china with its red flowers seemed to her for a second a marvellous mystery.

But there was another sound in the hall. It was the wind, but it was also a voice, talking. It must be Martin. But who could he be talking to, she wondered? She listened, but she could not hear what he was saying because of the wind. And why, she asked herself, did he say We can't tell a lie to save our souls? He was thinking about himself; one always knew when people were thinking about themselves by their tone of voice. Perhaps he was justifying himself for having left the Army. That had been courageous, she thought; but isn't it odd, she mused, listening to the voices, that he should be such a dandy too? He was wearing a new blue suit with white stripes on it. And he had shaved off his moustache. He ought never to have been a soldier, she thought; he was much too pugnacious. . . . They were still talking. She could not hear what he was saying, but from the sound of his voice it came over her that he must have a great many affairs. Yes – it became perfectly obvious to her, listening to his voice through the door, that he had a great many love affairs. But who with, and why do men think love affairs so important? she asked as the door opened.

'Hullo, Rose!' she exclaimed, surprised to see her sister come in too. 'I thought you were in Northumberland!'

'You thought I was in Northumberland!' Rose laughed, kissing her. 'But why? I said the eighteenth.'

'But isn't today the eleventh?' said Eleanor.

'You're only a week behind the times, Nell,' said Martin.

'Then I must have dated all my letters wrong!' Eleanor exclaimed. She glanced apprehensively at her writing-table. The walrus, with a worn patch in its bristles, no longer stood there.

'Tea, Rose?' she asked.

'No. It's a bath I want,' said Rose. She threw off her hat and ran her fingers through her hair.

'You're looking very well,' said Eleanor, thinking how handsome she looked. But she had a scratch on her chin.

'A positive beauty, isn't she?' Martin laughed at her.

Rose threw her head up rather like a horse. They always bickered, Eleanor thought – Martin and Rose. Rose was handsome, but she wished she dressed better. She was dressed in a green hairy coat and skirt with leather buttons, and she carried a shiny bag. She had been holding meetings in the North.

'I want a bath,' Rose repeated. 'I'm dirty. And what's all this?' she said, pointing to the press cuttings on the table. 'Oh, Uncle Digby,' she added casually, pushing them away. He had been dead some months now; they were already yellowish and curled.

'Martin says the house has been sold.' said Eleanor.

'Has it?' she said indifferently. She broke off a piece of cake and began munching it. 'Spoiling my dinner,' she said. 'But I had no time for lunch.'

'What a woman of action she is!' Martin chaffed her.

'And the meetings?' Eleanor asked.

'Yes. What about the North?' said Martin.

They began to discuss politics. She had been speaking at a by-election. A stone had been thrown at her; she put her hand to her chin. But she had enjoyed it.

'I think we gave 'em something to think about,' she said, breaking off another piece of cake.

She ought to have been the soldier, Eleanor thought. She was exactly like the picture of old Uncle Pargiter of Pargiter's Horse. Martin, now that he had shaved his moustache off and showed his lips, ought to have been – what? Perhaps an architect, she thought. He's so – she looked up. Now it was hailing. White rods came across the window in the back room. There was a great gust of wind; the little bushes blanched and bent under it. And a window banged upstairs in her mother's bedroom. Perhaps I ought to go and shut it, she thought. The rain must be coming in.

'Eleanor—' said Rose. 'Eleanor' – she repeated.

Eleanor started.

'Eleanor's broody,' said Martin.

'No, not at all – not at all,' she protested. 'What are you talking about?'

'I was asking you,' said Rose. 'Do you remember that row when the microscope was broken? Well, I met that boy – that horrid, ferret-faced boy – Erridge – up in the North.'

'He wasn't horrid,' said Martin.

'He was,' Rose persisted. 'A horrid little sneak. He pretended that it was I who broke the microscope and it was he who broke it. . . . D'you remember that row?' She turned to Eleanor.

'I don't remember that row,' said Eleanor. 'There were so many,' she added.

'That was one of the worst,' said Martin.

'It was,' said Rose. She pursed her lips together. Some memory seemed to have come back to her. 'And after it was over,' she said, turning to Martin, 'you came up into the nursery and asked me to go beetling with you in the Round Pond. D'you remember?'

She paused. There was something queer about the memory, Eleanor could see. She spoke with a curious intensity.

'And you said, "I'll ask you three times; and if you don't answer the third time, I'll go alone." And I swore, "I'll let him go alone." ' Her blue eyes blazed.

'I can see you,' said Martin. 'Wearing a pink frock, with a knife in your hand.'

'And you went,' Rose said; she spoke with suppressed vehemence. 'And I dashed into the bathroom and cut this gash' – she held out her wrist. Eleanor looked at it. There was a thin white scar just above the wrist joint.

When did she do that? Eleanor thought. She could not remember. Rose had locked herself into the bathroom with a knife and cut her wrist. She had known nothing about it. She looked at the white mark. It must have bled.

'Oh, Rose always was a firebrand!' said Martin. He got up. 'She always had the devil's own temper,' he added. He stood for a moment looking round the drawing-room, cluttered up with several hideous pieces of furniture that he would have got rid of had he been Eleanor, he thought, and forced to live there. But perhaps she did not mind things like that.

'Dining out?' she said. He dined out every night. She would like to have asked him where he was dining.

He nodded without saying anything. He met all sorts of people she did not know, she reflected; and he did not want to talk about them. He had turned to the fireplace.

'That picture wants cleaning,' he said, pointing to the picture of their mother.

'It's a nice picture,' he added, looking at it critically. 'But usen't there to be a flower in the grass?'

Eleanor looked at it. She had not looked at it, so as to see it, for many years.

'Was there?' she said.

'Yes. A little blue flower,' said Martin. 'I can remember it when I was a child. . . .'

He turned. Some memory from his childhood came over him as he saw Rose sitting there at the tea-table with her fist still clenched. He saw her standing with her back to the school-room door; very red in the face, with her lips tight shut as they were now. She had wanted him to do something. And he had crumpled a ball of paper in his hand and shied it at her.

'What awful lives children live!' he said, waving his hand at her as he crossed the room. 'Don't they, Rose?'

'Yes,' said Rose. 'And they can't tell anybody,' she added.

There was another gust and the sound of glass crashing.

'Miss Pym's conservatory?' said Martin, pausing with his hand on the door.

'Miss Pym?' said Eleanor. 'She's been dead these twenty years!'

1910

In the country it was an ordinary day enough; one of the long reel of days that turned as the years passed from green to orange; from grass to harvest. It was neither hot nor cold, an English spring day, bright enough, but a purple cloud behind the hill might mean rain. The grasses rippled with shadow, and then with sunlight.

In London, however, the stricture and pressure of the season were already felt, especially in the West End, where flags flew; canes tapped; dresses flowed; and houses freshly painted had awnings spread and swinging baskets of red geraniums. The Parks too – St James's, the Green Park, Hyde Park – were making ready. Already in the morning before there was a chance of a procession, the green chairs were ranged among the plump brown flower beds with their curled hyacinths, as if waiting for something to happen; for a curtain to rise; for Queen Alexandra to come, bowing through the gates. She had a face like a flower petal, and always wore her pink carnation.

Men lay flat on the grass reading newspapers with their shirts open; on the bald scrubbed space by the Marble Arch speakers congregated; nursemaids vacantly regarded them; and mothers, squatted on the grass, watched their children play. Down Park Lane and Piccadilly vans, cars, omnibuses ran along the streets as if the streets were slots; stopped and jerked; as if a puzzle were solved, and then broken, for it was the season and the streets were crowded. Over Park Lane and Piccadilly the clouds kept their freedom, wandering fitfully, staining windows gold, daubing them black, passed and vanished, though marble in Italy looked no more solid, gleaming in the quarries, veined with yellow, than the clouds over Park Lane.

If the bus stopped here, Rose thought, looking down over the side, she would get up. The bus stopped, and she rose. It was a pity, she thought, as she stepped on to the pavement and caught a glimpse of her own figure in a tailor's window, not to dress

better, not to look nicer. Always reach-me-downs, coats and skirts from Whiteleys. But they saved time, and the years after all – she was over forty – made one care very little what people thought. They used to say, why don't you marry? Why don't you do this or that, interfering. But not any longer.

She paused in one of the little alcoves that were scooped out in the bridge, from habit. People always stopped to look at the river. It was running fast, a muddy gold this morning with smooth breadths and ripples, for the tide was high. And there was the usual tug and the usual barges with black tarpaulins and corn showing. The water swirled round the arches. As she stood there, looking down at the water, some buried feeling began to arrange the stream into a pattern. The pattern was painful. She remembered how she had stood there on the night of a certain engagement, crying; her tears had fallen, her happiness, it seemed to her, had fallen. Then she had turned – here she turned – and had seen the churches, the masts and roofs of the city. There's *that*, she had said to herself. Indeed it was a splendid view . . . She looked, and then again she turned. There were the Houses of Parliament. A queer expression, half frown, half smile, formed on her face and she threw herself slightly backwards, as if she were leading an army.

'Damned humbugs!' she said aloud, striking her fist on the balustrade. A clerk who was passing looked at her with surprise. She laughed. She often talked aloud. Why not? That too was one of the consolations, like her coat and skirt, and the hat she stuck on without giving a look in the glass. If people chose to laugh, let them. She strode on. She was lunching in Hyams Place with her cousins. She had asked herself on the spur of the moment, meeting Maggie in a shop. First she had heard a voice; then seen a hand. And it was odd, considering how little she knew them – they had lived abroad – how strongly, sitting there at the counter before Maggie saw her, simply from the sound of her voice, she had felt – she supposed it was affection? – some feeling bred of blood in common. She had got up and said May I come and see you? busy as she was, hating to break her day in the middle. She walked on. They lived in Hyams Place, over the river – Hyams Place, that little crescent of old houses with the name carved in the middle which she used to pass so often when she lived down here. She used to ask herself in those far-off

days Who was Hyam? But she had never solved the question t her satisfaction. She walked on, across the river.

The shabby street on the south side of the river was ver noisy. Now and again a voice detached itself from the genera clamour. A woman shouted to her neighbour; a child cried. A man trundling a barrow opened his mouth and bawled up at the windows as he passed. There were bedsteads, grates, pokers and odd pieces of twisted iron on his barrow. But whether he was selling old iron or buying old iron it was impossible to say; the rhythm persisted; but the words were almost rubbed out.

The swarm of sound, the rush of traffic, the shouts of the hawkers, the single cries and the general cries, came into the upper room of the house in Hyams Place where Sara Pargiter sat at the piano. She was singing. Then she stopped; she watched her sister laying the table.

'Go search the valleys,' she murmured, as she watched her 'pluck up every rose.' She paused. 'That's very nice,' she added dreamily. Maggie had taken a bunch of flowers; had cut the tight little string which bound them, and had laid them side by side on the table; and was arranging them in an earthenware pot. They were differently coloured, blue, white and purple. Sara watched her arranging them. She laughed suddenly.

'What are you laughing at?' said Maggie absentmindedly. She added a purple flower to the bunch and looked at it.

'Dazed in a rapture of contemplation,' said Sara, 'shading her eyes with peacocks' feathers dipped in morning dew—' she pointed to the table. 'Maggie said,' she jumped up and pirouetted about the room, 'three's the same as two, three's the same as two.' She pointed to the table upon which three places had been laid.

'But we are three,' said Maggie. 'Rose is coming.' Sara stopped. Her face fell.

'Rose is coming?' she repeated.

'I told you,' said Maggie. 'I said to you, Rose is coming to luncheon on Friday. It is Friday. And Rose is coming to luncheon. Any minute now,' she said. She got up and began to fold some stuff that was lying on the floor.

'It is Friday, and Rose is coming to luncheon,' Sara repeated.

'I told you,' said Maggie. 'I was in a shop. I was buying stuff. And somebody' – she paused to make her fold more accurately

– 'came out from behind a counter and said, "I'm your cousin. I'm Rose," she said. "Can I come and see you? Any day, any time," she said. So I said,' she put the stuff on a chair, 'lunch.'

She looked round the room to see that everything was in readiness. Chairs were missing. Sara pulled up a chair.

'Rose is coming,' she said, 'and this is where she'll sit.' She placed the chair at the table facing the window. 'And she'll take off her gloves; and she'll lay one on this side, one on that. And she'll say, "I've never been in this part of London before." '

'And then?' said Maggie, looking at the table.

'You'll say "It's so convenient for the theatres." '

'And then?' said Maggie.

'And then she'll say rather wistfully, smiling, putting her head on one side, "D'you often go to the theatre, Maggie?" '

'No,' said Maggie. 'Rose has red hair.'

'Red hair? Sara exclaimed. 'I thought it was grey – a little wisp straggling from under a black bonnet,' she added.

'No,' said Maggie. 'She has a great deal of hair; and it's red.'

'Red hair; red Rose,' Sara exclaimed. She spun round on her toe. 'Rose of the flaming heart; Rose of the burning breast; Rose of the weary world – red, red Rose!'

A door slammed below; they heard footsteps mounting the stairs. 'There she is,' said Maggie.

The steps stopped. They heard a voice saying, 'Still further up? On the very top? Thank you.' Then the steps began mounting the stairs again.

'This is the worst torture . . .' Sara began, screwing her hands together and clinging to her sister, 'that life. . . .'

'Don't be such an ass,' said Maggie, pushing her away, as the door opened.

Rose came in.

'It's ages since we met,' she said, shaking hands.

She wondered what had made her come. Everything was different from what she expected. The room was rather poverty-stricken; the carpet did not cover the floor. There was a sewing-machine in the corner, and Maggie too looked different from what she had looked in the shop. But there was a crimson and-gilt chair; she recognized it with relief.

'That used to stand in the hall, didn't it?' she said, putting her bag down on the chair.

'Yes,' said Maggie.

'And that glass—' said Rose, looking at the old Italian glas blurred with spots that hung between the windows, 'wasn't tha there too?'

'Yes,' said Maggie, 'in my mother's bedroom.'

There was a pause. There seemed to be nothing to say.

'What nice rooms you've found!' Rose continued, making con versation. It was a large room and the door-posts had little carving on them. 'But don't you find it rather noisy?' she continued.

The man was crying under the window. She looked out of th window. Opposite there was a row of slate roofs, like half opened umbrellas; and, rising high above them, a great buildin which, save for thin black strokes across it, seemed to be mad entirely of glass. It was a factory. The man bawled in the stree underneath.

'Yes, it's noisy,' said Maggie. 'But very convenient.'

'Very convenient for the theatres,' said Sara, as she put dowr the meat.

'So I remember finding,' said Rose, turning to look at her 'when I lived here myself.'

'Did you live here?' said Maggie, beginning to help the cutlets

'Not here,' she said. 'Round the corner. With a friend.'

'We thought you lived in Abercorn Terrace,' said Sara.

'Can't one live in more places that one?' Rose asked, feeling vaguely annoyed, for she had lived in many places, felt many passions, and done many things.

'I remember Abercorn Terrace,' said Maggie. She paused. 'There was a long room; and a tree at the end; and a picture over the fireplace, of a girl with red hair?'

Rose nodded. 'Mama when she was young,' she said.

'And a round table in the middle?' Maggie continued.

Rose nodded.

'And you had a parlourmaid with very prominent blue eyes?'

'Crosby. She's still with us.'

They ate in silence.

'And then?' said Sara, as if she were a child asking for a story.

'And then?' said Rose. 'Well then' – she looked at Maggie, thinking of her as a little girl who had come to tea.

She saw them sitting round a table; and a detail that she had not thought of for years came back to her – how Milly used to take her hairpin and fray the wick of the kettle. And she saw

Eleanor sitting with her account books; and she saw herself go up to her and say: 'Eleanor, I want to go to Lamley's.'

Her past seemed to be rising above her present. And for some reason she wanted to talk about her past; to tell them something about herself that she had never told anybody – something hidden. She paused, gazing at the flowers in the middle of the table without seeing them. There was a blue knot in the yellow glaze she noticed.

'I remember Uncle Abel,' said Maggie. 'He gave me a necklace; a blue necklace with gold spots.'

'He's still alive,' said Rose.

They talked, she thought, as if Abercorn Terrace were a scene in a play. They talked as if they were speaking of people who were real, but not real in the way in which she felt herself to be real. It puzzled her; it made her feel that she was two different people at the same time; that she was living at two different times at the same moment. She was a little girl wearing a pink frock; and here she was in this room, now. But there was a great rattle under the windows. A day went roaring past. The glasses jingled on the table. She started slightly, roused from her thoughts about her childhood, and separated the glasses.

'Don't you find it very noisy here?' she said.

'Yes. But very convenient for the theatres,' said Sara.

Rose looked up. She had repeated herself. She thinks me an old fool, Rose thought, making the same remark twice over. She blushed slightly.

What is the use, she thought, of trying to tell people about one's past? What is one's past? She stared at the pot with the blue knot loosely tied in the yellow glaze. Why did I come, she thought, when they only laugh at me? Sally rose and cleared away the plates.

'And Delia—' Maggie began as they waited. She pulled the pot towards her, and began to arrange the flowers. She was not listening; she was thinking her own thoughts. She reminded Rose, as she watched her, of Digby – absorbed in the arrangement of a bunch of flowers, as if to arrange flowers, to put the white by the blue, were the most important thing in the world.

'She married an Irishman,' she said aloud.

Maggie took a blue flower and placed it beside a white flower.

'And Edward?' she asked.

'Edward . . .' Rose was beginning, Sally came in with th pudding.

'Edward!' she exclaimed, catching the word.

'Oh blasted eyes of my deceased wife's sister – withered pro of my defunct old age . . .' She put down the pudding. 'That Edward,' she said. 'A quotation from a book he gave me. "M wasted youth – my wasted youth" . . .' The voice was Edward' Rose could hear him say it. For he had a way of belittling hin self, when in fact he had a very good opinion of himself.

But it was not the whole of Edward. And she would not hav him laughed at; for she was very fond of her brother and ver proud of him.

'There's not much of "my wasted youth" about Edward now she said.

'I thought not,' said Sara, taking her place opposite.

They were silent. Rose looked at the flower again. Why did come? she kept asking herself. Why had she broken up he morning, and interrupted her day's work, when it was clear t her that they had not wished to see her?

'Go on, Rose,' said Maggie, helping the pudding. 'Go on tellin us about the Pargiters.'

'About the Pargiters?' said Rose. She saw herself runnin along the broad avenue in the lamplight.

'What could be more ordinary?' she said. 'A large famil living in a large house . . . And yet she felt that she had bee herself very interesting. She paused. Sara looked at her.

'It's not ordinary,' she said. 'The Pargiters—' She was holding fork in her hand, and she drew a line on the table-cloth. 'Th Pargiters,' she repeated, 'going on and on and on' – here her for touched a salt-cellar – 'until they came to a rock,' she said; 'an then Rose' – she looked at her again: Rose drew herself u slightly, '—Rose claps spurs to her horse, rides straight up to man in a gold coat, and says "Damn your eyes!" Isn't that Rose Maggie?' she said, looking at her sister as if she had been draw ing her picture on the table-cloth.

That is true. Rose thought as she took her pudding. That i myself. Again she had the odd feeling of being two people at th same time.

'Well, that's done,' said Maggie, pushing away her plate 'Come and sit in the armchair, Rose,' she said.

She went over to the fireplace and pulled out an armchair, which had springs like hoops, Rose noticed, in the seat.

They were poor, Rose thought, glancing round her. That was why they had chosen this house to live in – because it was cheap. They cooked their own food – Sally had gone into the kitchen to make the coffee. She drew her chair up beside Maggie's.

'You make your own clothes?' she said, pointing to the sewing-machine in the corner. There was silk folded on it.

'Yes,' said Maggie, looking at the sewing-machine.

'For a party?' said Rose. The stuff was silk, green, with blue on it.

'Tomorrow night,' said Maggie. She raised her hand with a curious gesture to her face, as if she wanted to conceal something. She wants to hide herself from me, Rose thought, as I want to hide myself from her. She watched her; she had got up, had fetched the silk and the sewing-machine, and was threading the needle. Her hands were large and thin and strong, Rose noticed.

'I never could make my own clothes,' she said, watching her arrange the silk smoothly under the needle. She was beginning to feel at her ease. She took off her hat and threw it on the floor. Maggie looked at her with approval. She was handsome, in a ravaged way; more like a man than a woman.

'But then,' said Maggie, beginning to turn the handle rather cautiously, 'you did other things.' She spoke in the absorbed tones of someone who is using their hands.

The machine made a comfortable whirring sound as the needle pricked through the silk.

'Yes, I did other things,' said Rose, stroking the cat that had stretched itself against her knee, 'when I lived down here.'

'But that was years ago,' she added, 'when I was young. I lived here with a friend,' she sighed, 'and taught little thieves.'

Maggie said nothing; she was whirring the machine round and round.

'I always liked thieves better than other people,' Rose added after a time.

'Yes,' said Maggie.

'I never liked being at home,' said Rose. 'I liked being on my own much better.'

'Yes,' said Maggie.

Rose went on talking.

It was quite easy to talk, she found; quite easy. And there w
no need to say anything clever; or to talk about one's self. S
was talking about the Waterloo Road as she remembered
when Sara came in with the coffee.

'What was that about clinging to a fat man in the Campagna
she asked, setting her tray down.

'The Campagna?' said Rose. 'There was nothing about t
Campagna.'

'Heard through a door,' said Sara, pouring out the coffee, 'ta
sounds very odd.' She gave Rose her cup.

'I thought you were talking about Italy; about the Campagn
about the moonlight.'

Rose shook her head. 'We were talking about the Waterlo
Road,' she said. But what had she been talking about? N
simply about the Waterloo Road. Perhaps she had been talkin
nonsense. She had been saying the first thing that came into h
head.

'All talk would be nonsense, I suppose, if it were writt
down,' she said, stirring her coffee.

Maggie stopped the machine for a moment and smiled.

'And even if it isn't,' she said.

'But it's the only way we have of knowing each other,' Ro
protested. She looked at her watch. It was later than sh
thought. She got up.

'I must go,' she said. 'But why don't you come with me?' sh
added on the spur of the moment.

Maggie looked up at her. 'Where?' she said.

Rose was silent. 'To a meeting,' she said at length. She wante
to conceal the thing that interested her most; she felt extr
ordinarily shy. And yet she wanted them to come. But why? sh
asked herself, as she stood there awkwardly waiting. There wa
a pause.

'You could wait upstairs,' she said suddenly. 'And you'd se
Eleanor; you'd see Martin – the Pargiters in the flesh,' she adde
She remembered Sara's phrase, 'the caravan crossing the desert
she said.

She looked at Sara. She was balancing herself on the arm of
chair, sipping her coffee and swinging her foot up and down.

'Shall I come?' she asked, vaguely, still swinging her foot u
and down.

Rose shrugged her shoulders. 'If you like,' she said.

'But should I like it?' Sara continued, still swinging her foot. '. . . this meeting? What do you think, Maggie?' she said, appealing to her sister. 'Shall I go, or shan't I? Shall I go, or shan't I?' Maggie said nothing.

Then Sara got up, went to the window and stood there for a moment humming a tune. 'Go search the valleys; pluck up every rose,' she hummed. The man was passing; he was crying 'Any old iron? Any old iron?' She turned round with a sudden jerk.

'I'll come,' she said, as if she had made up her mind. 'I'll fling on my clothes and come.'

She sprang up and went into the bedroom. She's like one of those birds at the Zoo, Rose thought, that never flies but hops rapidly across the grass.

She turned to the window. It was a depressing little street, she thought. There was a public house at the corner. The houses opposite looked very dingy, and it was very noisy. 'Any old iron to sell?' the man was crying under the window, 'any old iron?' Children were screaming in the road; they were playing a game with chalk-marks on the pavement. She stood there looking down on them.

'Poor little wretches!' she said. She picked up her hat and ran two bonnet-pins sharply through it. 'Don't you find it rather unpleasant,' she said, giving her hat a little pat on one side as she looked in the looking-glass, 'coming home late at night sometimes with that public house at the corner?'

'Drunken men, you mean?' said Maggie.

'Yes,' said Rose. She buttoned the row of leather buttons on her tailor-made suit and gave herself a little pat here and there, as if she were making ready.

'And now what are you talking about?' said Sara, coming in carrying her shoes. 'Another visit to Italy?'

'No,' said Maggie. She spoke indistinctly because her mouth was full of pins. 'Drunken men following one.'

'Drunken men following one,' said Sara. She sat down and began to put on her shoes.

'But they don't follow me,' she said. Rose smiled. That was obvious. She was sallow, angular and plain. 'I can walk over Waterloo Bridge at any hour of the day or night,' she continued, tugging at her shoe-laces, 'and nobody notices.' The

shoe-lace was in a knot; she fumbled with it. 'But I can remem ber,' she continued, 'being told by a woman – a very beautif woman – she was like—'

'Hurry up,' Maggie interrupted. 'Rose is waiting.'

'... Rose is waiting – well, the woman told me, when sh went into Regent's Park to have an ice' – she stood up, trying t fit her shoe on to her foot, '—to have an ice, at one of thos little tables under the trees, one of those little round tables lai with a cloth under the trees' – she hopped about with one sho off and one shoe on – 'the eyes, she said, came through ever leaf like the darts of the sun; and her ice was melted. . . . Her ic was melted!' she repeated, tapping her sister on the shoulder a she twirled round on her toe.

Rose held out her hand. 'You're going to stay and finish you dress?' she said. 'You won't come with us?' It was Maggie sh wanted to come.

'No, I won't come,' said Maggie, shaking hands. 'I should hat it,' she added, smiling at Rose with a candour that wa baffling.

Did she mean me? thought Rose as she went down the stair Did she mean that she hated me? When I liked her so much?

In the alley that led into the old square off Holborn an elderl man, battered and red-nosed, as if he had weathered out man years at street corners, was selling violets. He had his pitch by row of posts. The bunches, tightly laced, each with a green fri of leaves round the rather withered flowers, lay in a row on th tray; for he had not sold many.

'Nice vilets, fresh vilets,' he repeated automatically as th people passed. Most of them went by without looking. But h went on repeating his formula automatically. 'Nice vilets, fres vilets,' as if he scarcely expected any one to buy. Then two ladie came; and he held out his violets, and he said once more 'Nic vilets, fresh vilets.' One of them slapped down two coppers o his tray; and he looked up. The other lady stopped, put her han on the post, and said, 'Here I leave you.' Upon which the on who was short and stout, struck her on the shoulder and said 'Don't be such an ass!' And the tall lady gave a sudden cackle o laughter, took a bunch of violets from the tray as if she had pai for it; and off they walked. She's an odd customer, he thought - she took the violets though she hadn't paid for them. H

watched them walking round the square; then began muttering again, 'Nice vilets, sweet vilets.'

'Is this the place where you meet?' said Sara as they walked along the square.

It was very quiet. The noise of the traffic had ceased. The trees were not in full leaf yet, and pigeons were shuffling and crooning on the tree tops. Little bits of twig fell on the pavement as the birds fidgeted among the branches. A soft air puffed in their faces. They walked on round the square.

'That's the house over there,' said Rose, pointing. She stopped when she reached a house with a carved doorway, and many names on the door-post. The windows on the ground floor were open; the curtains blew in and out, and through them they could see a row of heads, as if people were sitting round a table, talking.

Rose paused on the door-step.

'Are you coming in,' she said, 'or aren't you?'

Sara hesitated. She peered in. Then she brandished her bunch of violets in Rose's face and cried out, 'All right!' she cried. 'Ride on!'

Miriam Parrish was reading a letter. Eleanor was blackening the strokes on her blotting-paper. I've heard all this, I've done all this so often, she was thinking. She glanced round the table. People's faces even seemed to repeat themselves. There's the Judd type, there's the Lazenby type, and there's Miriam, she thought, drawing on her blotting-paper. I know what he's going to say, I know what she's going to say, she thought, digging a little hole in the blotting-paper. Here Rose came in. But who's that with her, Eleanor asked? She did not recognize her. Whoever it was was waved by Rose to a seat in the corner, and the meeting went on. Why must we do it? Eleanor thought, drawing a spoke from the hole in the middle. She looked up. Someone was rattling a stick along the railings and whistling; the branches of a tree swung up and down in the garden outside. The leaves were already unfolding. . . . Miriam put down her papers; Mr Spicer rose.

There's no other way, I suppose, she thought, taking up her pencil again. She made a note as Mr Spicer spoke. She found that her pencil could take notes quite accurately while she herself

thought of something else. She seemed able to divide herself int two. One person followed the argument – and he's putting very well, she thought; while the other, for it was a fine afte noon, and she had wanted to go to Kew, walked down a gree glade and stopped in front of a flowering tree. Is it a magnoli she asked herself, or are they already over? Magnolias, she re membered, have no leaves, but masses of white blossom. . . . Sh drew a line on the blotting-paper.

Now Pickford . . . she said, looking up again. Mr Pickfor spoke. She drew more spokes; blackened them. Then she looke up, for there was a change in the tone of voice.

'I know Westminster very well,' Miss Ashford was saying.

'So do I!' said Mr Pickford. 'I've lived there for forty years.'

Eleanor was surprised. She had always thought he lived a Ealing. He lived at Westminster, did he? He was a clean-shaven dapper little man, whom she had always seen in her mind' eye running to catch a train with a newspaper under hi arm. But he lived at Westminster, did he? That was odd, sh thought.

Then they went on arguing again. The cooing of the pigeon became audible. Take two coos, take two coos, tak . . . they were crooning. Martin was speaking. And he speaks very well she thought . . . but he shouldn't be sarcastic; it puts people' backs up. She drew another stroke.

Then she heard the rush of a car outside; it stopped outsid the window. Martin stopped speaking. There was a momentar pause. Then the door opened and in came a tall woman in even ing dress. Everybody looked up.

'Lady Lasswade!' said Mr Pickford, getting up and scrapin back his chair.

'Kitty!' Eleanor exclaimed. She half rose, but she sat dow again. There was a little stir. A chair was found for her. Lad Lasswade took her place opposite Eleanor.

'I'm so sorry,' she apologized, 'to be so late. And for coming i these ridiculous clothes,' she added, touching her cloak. She di look strange, dressed in evening dress in broad daylight. Ther was something shining in her hair.

'The Opera?' said Martin as she sat down beside him.

'Yes,' she said briefly. She laid her white gloves in a business like way on the table. Her cloak opened and showed the gleam of a silver dress beneath. She did look odd compared with the

others; but it's very good of her to come, Eleanor thought, looking at her, considering she's going to the Opera. The meeting began again.

How long has she been married? Eleanor wondered. How long is it since we broke the swing together at Oxford? She drew another stroke on the blotting-paper. The dot was now surrounded with strokes.

'... and we discussed the whole matter perfectly frankly,' Kitty was saying. Eleanor listened. That's the manner I like, she thought. She had been meeting Sir Edward at dinner. . . . It's the great ladies' manner, Eleanor thought . . . authoritative, natural. She listened again. The great ladies' manner charmed Mr Pickford; but it irritated Martin, she knew. He was pooh-poohing Sir Edward and his frankness. Then Mr Spicer was off again; and Kitty had joined in. Now there was Rose. They were all at loggerheads. Eleanor listened. She became more and more irritated. All it comes to is: I'm right and you're wrong, she thought. This bickering merely wasted time. If we could only get something, something deeper, deeper, she thought, prodding her pencil on the blotting-paper. Suddenly she saw the only point that was of any importance. She had the words on the tip of her tongue. She opened her mouth to speak. But just as she cleared her throat, Mr Pickford swept his papers together and rose. Would they pardon him? he said. He had to be at the Law Courts. He rose and went.

The meeting dragged on. The ash-tray in the middle of the table became full of cigarette-stumps; the air became thick with smoke; then Mr Spicer went; Miss Bodham went; Miss Ashford wound a scarf tightly round her neck, snapped her attaché-case to, and strode out of the room. Miriam Parrish took off her pince-nez and fixed them to a hook that was sewn on to the front of her dress. Everybody was going; the meeting was over. Eleanor got up. She wanted to speak to Kitty. But Miriam intercepted her.

'About coming to see you on Wednesday,' she began.

'Yes,' said Eleanor.

'I've just remembered I've promised to take a niece to the dentist,' said Miriam.

'Saturday would suit me just as well,' said Eleanor.

Miriam paused. She pondered.

'Would Monday do instead?' she said.

'I'll write,' said Eleanor with an irritation that she could neve conceal, saint though Miriam was, and Miriam fluttered away with a guilty air as if she were a little dog caught stealing.

Eleanor turned. The others were still arguing.

'You'll agree with me one of these days,' Martin was saying.

'Never! Never!' said Kitty, slapping her gloves on the table She looked very handsome; at the same time rather absurd in her evening dress.

'Why didn't you speak, Nell?' she said, turning on her.

'Because—' Eleanor began, 'I don't know,' she added, rather feebly. She felt suddenly shabby and dowdy compared with Kitty, who stood there in full evening dress with something shining in her hair.

'Well,' said Kitty, turning away. 'I must be off. But can't I give anyone a lift?' she said, pointing to the window. There was her car.

'What a magnificent car!' said Martin, looking at it, with a sneer in his voice.

'It's Charlie's,' said Kitty rather sharply.

'What about you, Eleanor?' she said, turning to her.

'Thanks,' said Eleanor: '—one moment.'

She had muddled her things up. She had left her gloves somewhere. Had she brought an umbrella, or hadn't she? She felt flustered and dowdy, as if she were a schoolgirl suddenly. There was the magnificent car waiting, and the chauffeur held the door open with a rug in his hand.

'Get in,' said Kitty. And she got in and the chauffeur put the rug over her knees.

'We'll leave them,' said Kitty, with a wave of her hand, 'caballing'. And the car drove off.

'What a pig-headed set they are!' said Kitty, turning to Eleanor.

'Force is always wrong – don't you agree with me? – always wrong!' she repeated, drawing the rug over her knees. She was still under the influence of the meeting. Yet she wanted to talk to Eleanor. They met so seldom; she liked her so much. But she was shy, sitting there in her absurd clothes, and she could not jerk her mind out of the rut of the meeting in which it was running.

'What a pig-headed set they are!' she repeated. Then she began:

'Tell me. . . .'

There were many things that she wanted to ask; but the engine was so powerful; the car swept in and out of the traffic so smoothly; before she had time to say any of the things she wanted to say Eleanor had put her hand out because they had reached the Tube station.

'Would he stop here?' she said, rising.

'But must you get out?' Kitty began. She had wanted to talk to her. 'I must, I must,' said Eleanor. 'Papa's expecting me.' She felt like a child again beside this great lady and the chauffeur, who was holding the door open.

'Do come and see me – do let us meet again soon, Nell,' said Kitty, taking her hand.

The car started on again. Lady Lasswade sat back in her corner. She wished she saw more of Eleanor, she thought; but she never could get her to come and dine. It was always 'Papa's expecting me' or some other excuse, she thought rather bitterly. They had gone such different ways, they had lived such different lives, since Oxford. . . . The car slowed down. It had to take its place in the long line of cars that moved at a foot's pace, now stopping dead, now jerking on, down the narrow street, blocked by market carts, that led to the Opera House. Men and women in full evening dress were walking along the pavement. They looked uncomfortable and self-conscious as they dodged between costers' barrows, with their high piled hair and their evening cloaks; with their button-holes and their white waistcoats, in the glare of the afternoon sun. The ladies tripped uncomfortably on their high-heeled shoes, now and then they put their hands to their heads. The gentlemen kept close beside them as though protecting them. It's absurd, Kitty thought; it's ridiculous to come out in full evening dress at this time of day. She leant back in her corner. Covent Garden porters, dingy little clerks in their ordinary working clothes, coarse-looking women in aprons stared in at her. The air smelt strongly of oranges and bananas. But the car was coming to a standstill. It drew up under the archway; she pushed through the glass doors and went in.

She felt at once a sense of relief. Now that the daylight was

extinguished and the air glowed yellow and crimson, she no longer felt absurd. On the contrary, she felt appropriate. The ladies and gentlemen who were mounting the stairs were dressed exactly as she was. The smell of oranges and bananas had been replaced by another smell – a subtle mixture of clothes and gloves and flowers that affected her pleasantly. The carpet was thick beneath her feet. She went along the corridor till she came to her own box with the card on it. She went in and the whole Opera House opened in front of her. She was not late after all. The orchestra was still tuning up; the players were laughing, talking and turning round in their seats as they fiddled busily with their instruments. She stood looking down at the stalls. The floor of the house was in a state of great agitation. People were passing to their seats; they were sitting down and getting up again; they were taking off their cloaks and signalling to friends. They were like birds settling on a field. In the boxes white figures were appearing here and there; white arms rested on the ledges of boxes; white shirt-fronts shone beside them. The whole house glowed – red, gold, cream-coloured, and smelt of clothes and flowers, and echoed with the squeaks and trills of the instruments and with the buzz and hum of voices. She glanced at the programme that was laid on the ledge of her box. It was *Siegfried* – her favourite opera. In a little space within the highly decorated border the names of the cast were given. She stooped to read them; then a thought struck her and she glanced at the royal box. It was empty. As she looked the door opened and two men came in; one was her cousin Edward; the other a boy, a cousin of her husband's.

'They haven't put it off?' he said as he shook hands. 'I was afraid they might.' He was something in the Foreign Office; with a handsome Roman head.

They all looked instinctively at the royal box. Programmes lay along the edge; but there was no bouquet of pink carnations. The box was empty.

'The doctors have given him up,' said the young man, looking very important. They all think they know everything, Kitty thought, smiling at his air of private information.

'But if he dies?' she said, looking at the royal box, 'd'you think they'll stop it?'

The young man shrugged his shoulders. About that he could not be positive apparently. The house was filling up. Lights

winked on ladies' arms as they turned; ripples of light flashed, stopped, and then flashed the opposite way as they turned their heads.

But now the conductor pushed his way through the orchestra to his raised seat. There was an outburst of applause; he turned, bowed to the audience; turned again, all the lights sank down; the overture had begun.

Kitty leant back against the wall of the box; her face was shaded by the folds of the curtain. She was glad to be shaded. As they played the overture she looked at Edward. She could only see the outline of his face in the red glow; it was heavier than it used to be; but he looked intellectual, handsome and a little remote as he listened to the overture. It wouldn't have done, she thought; I'm much too ... she did not finish the sentence. He has never married, she thought; and she had. And I've three boys. I've been in Australia, I've been in India. ... The music made her think of herself and her own life as she seldom did. It exalted her; it cast a flattering light over herself, her past. But why did Martin laugh at me for having a car? she thought. What's the good of laughing? she asked.

Here the curtain went up. She leant forward and looked at the stage. The dwarf was hammering at the sword. Hammer, hammer, hammer, he went with little short, sharp strokes. She listened. The music had changed. *He*, she thought, looking at the handsome boy, knows exactly what the music means. He was already completely possessed by the music. She liked the look of complete absorption that had swum up on top of his immaculate respectability, making him seem almost stern. ... But here was Siegfried. She leant forward. Dressed in leopard-skins, very fat, with nut-brown thighs, leading a bear – here he was. She liked the fat bouncing young man in his flaxen wig: his voice was magnificent. Hammer, hammer, hammer he went. She leant back again. What did that make her think of? A young man who came into a room with shavings in his hair ... when she was very young. In Oxford? She had gone to tea with them; had sat on a hard chair; in a very light room; and there was a sound of hammering in the garden. And then a boy came in with shavings in his hair. And she had wanted him to kiss her. Or was it the farm hand up at Carter's, when old Carter had loomed up suddenly leading a bull with a ring through its nose?

'That's the sort of life I like,' she thought, taking up her opera

glasses. 'That's the sort of person I am. . . .' she finished her sentence.

Then she put the opera glasses to her eyes. The scenery suddenly became bright and close; the grass seemed to be made of thick green wool; she could see Siegfried's fat brown arms glistening with paint. His face was shiny. She put down the glasses and leant back in her corner.

And old Lucy Craddock – she saw Lucy sitting at a table; with her red nose, and her patient, kind eyes. 'So you've done no work this week again, Kitty!' she said reproachfully. How I loved her! Kitty thought. And then she had gone back to the Lodge; and there was the tree, with a prop in the middle; and her mother sitting bolt upright. . . . I wish I hadn't quarrelled so much with my mother, she thought, overcome with a sudden sense of the passage of time and its tragedy. Then the music changed.

She looked at the stage again. The Wanderer had come in. He was sitting on a bank in a long grey dressing-gown; and a patch wobbled uncomfortably over one of his eyes. On and on he went; on and on. Her attention flagged. She glanced round the dim red house; she could only see white elbows pointed on the ledges of boxes; here and there a sharp pin-point of light showed as some one followed the score with a torch. Edward's fine profile again caught her eye. He was listening, critically, intently. It wouldn't have done, she thought, it wouldn't have done at all.

At last the Wanderer had gone. And now? she asked herself, leaning forward. Siegfried burst in. Dressed in his leopard-skins, laughing and singing, here he was again. The music excited her. It was magnificent. Siegfried took the broken pieces of the sword and blew on the fire and hammered, hammered, hammered. The singing, the hammering and the fire leaping all went on the same time. Quicker and quicker, more and more rhythmically, more and more triumphantly he hammered, until at last up he swung the sword high above his head and brought it down – crack! The anvil burst asunder. And then he brandished the sword over his head and shouted and sang; and the music rushed higher and higher; and the curtain fell.

The lights opened in the middle of the house. All the colour came back. The whole Opera House leapt into life again with its faces and its diamonds and its men and women. They were

clapping and waving their programmes. The whole house seemed to be fluttering with white squares of paper. The curtains fell apart and were held back by tall footmen in knee-breeches. Kitty stood up and clapped. Again the curtains closed; again they parted. The footmen were almost pulled off their feet by the heavy folds that they had to hold back. Again and again they held the curtain back; and even when they had let it fall and the singers had disappeared and the orchestra were leaving their seats, the audience still stood clapping and waving their programmes.

Kitty turned to the young man in her box. He was leaning over the ledge. He was still clapping. He was shouting 'Bravo! Bravo!' He had forgotten her. He had forgotten himself.

'Wasn't that marvellous?' he said at last, turning round.

There was an odd look on his face as if he were in two worlds at once and had to draw them together.

'Marvellous!' she agreed. She looked at him with a pang of envy.

'And now,' she said, gathering her things together, 'let us have dinner.'

At Hyams Place they had finished dinner. The table was cleared; only a few crumbs remained, and the pot of flowers stood in the middle of the table like a sentry. The only sound in the room was the stitching of a needle, pricking through silk, for Maggie was sewing. Sara sat hunched on the music stool, but she was not playing.

'Sing something,' said Maggie suddenly. Sara turned and struck the notes.

'Brandishing, flourishing my sword in my hand . . .' she sang. The words were the words of some pompous eighteenth century march, but her voice was reedy and thin. Her voice broke. She stopped singing.

She sat silent with her hands on the notes. 'What's the good of singing if one hasn't any voice?' she murmured. Maggie went on sewing.

'What did you do today?' she said at length, looking up abruptly.

'Went out with Rose,' said Sara.

'And what did you do with Rose?' said Maggie. She spoke absentmindedly. Sara turned and glanced at her. Then she

began to play again. 'Stood on the bridge and looked into the water,' she murmured.

'Stood on the bridge and looked into the water,' she hummed, in time to the music. 'Running water; flowing water. May my bones turn to coral; and fish light their lanthorns; fish light their green lanthorns in my eyes.' She half turned and looked round at Maggie. But she was not attending. Sara was silent. She looked at the notes again. But she did not see the notes, she saw a garden; flowers; and her sister; and a young man with a big nose who stooped to pick a flower that was gleaming in the dark. And he held the flower out in his hand in the moonlight ... Maggie interrupted her.

'You went out with Rose,' she said. 'Where to?'

Sara left the piano and stood in front of the fireplace.

'We got into a bus and went to Holborn,' she said. 'And we walked along a street,' she went on; 'and suddenly,' she jerked her hand out, 'I felt a clap on my shoulder.' 'Damned liar!' said Rose, 'and took me and flung me against a public house wall!'

Maggie stitched on in silence.

'You got into a bus and went to Holborn,' she repeated mechanically after a time. 'And then?'

'Then we went in to a room,' Sara continued, 'and there were people – multitudes of people. And I said to myself ...' she paused.

'A meeting?' Maggie murmured. 'Where?'

'In a room,' Sara answered. 'A pale greenish light. A woman hanging clothes on a line in the back garden; and someone went by rattling a stick on the railings.'

'I see,' said Maggie. She stitched on quickly.

'I said to myself,' Sara resumed, 'whose heads are those ...' she paused.

'A meeting,' Maggie interrupted her. 'What for? What about?'

'There were pigeons cooing,' Sara went on. 'Take two coos, Taffy. Take two coos ... Tak ... And then a wing darkened the air, and in came Kitty clothed in starlight; and sat on a chair.'

She paused. Maggie was silent. She went on stitching for a moment.

'Who came in?' she asked at length.

'Somebody very beautiful; clothed in starlight; with green in her hair,' said Sara. 'Whereupon' – here she changed her voice and imitated the tones in which a middle-class man might be

supposed to welcome a lady of fashion, 'up jumps Mr Pickford, and says "Oh, Lady Lasswade, won't you take this chair?" '

She pushed a chair in front of her.

'And then,' she went on, flourishing her hands, 'Lady Lasswade sits down; puts her gloves on the table,' – she patted a cushion – 'like that.'

Maggie looked up over her sewing. She had a general impression of a room full of people; sticks rattling on the railings; clothes hanging out to dry, and someone coming in with beetles' wings in her hair.

'What happened then?' she asked.

'Then withered Rose, spiky Rose, tawny Rose, thorny Rose,' Sara burst out laughing, 'shed a tear.'

'No, no,' said Maggie. There was something wrong with the story; something impossible. She looked up. The light of a passing car slid across the ceiling. It was growing too dark to see. The lamp from the public house opposite made a yellow glare in the room; the ceiling trembled with a watery pattern of fluctuating light. There was a sound of brawling in the street outside; a scuffling and trampling as if the police were hauling someone along the street against his will. Voices jeered and shouted after him.

'Another row?' Maggie murmured, sticking her needle in the stuff.

Sara got up and went to the window. A crowd had gathered outside the public house. A man was being thrown out. There he came, staggering. He fell against a lamp-post to which he clung. The scene was lit up by the glare of the lamp over the public house door. Sara stood for a moment at the window watching them. Then she turned; her face in the mixed light looked cadaverous and worn, as if she were no longer a girl, but an old woman worn out by a life of childbirth, debauchery and crime. She stood there hunched up, with her hands clenched together.

'In time to come,' she said, looking at her sister, 'people, looking into this room – this cave, this little antre, scooped out of mud and dung, will hold their fingers to their noses' – she held her fingers to her nose – 'and say "Pah! They stink!" '

She fell down into a chair.

Maggie looked at her. Curled round, with her hair falling over her face and her hands screwed together she looked like some great ape, crouching there in a little cave of mud and dung.

'Pah!' Maggie repeated to herself, 'They stink' . . . She drove her needle through the stuff in a spasm of disgust. It was true, she thought; they were nasty little creatures, driven by uncontrollable lusts. The night was full of roaring and cursing; of violence and unrest, also of beauty and joy. She got up, holding the dress in her hands. The folds of silk fell down to the floor and she ran her hand over them.

'That's done. That's finished,' she said, laying the dress on the table. There was nothing more she could do with her hands. She folded the dress up and put it away. Then the cat, which had been asleep, rose very slowly, arched its back and stretched itself to its full length.

'You want your supper, do you?' said Maggie. She went into the kitchen and came back with a saucer of milk. 'There, poor puss,' she said, putting the saucer down on the floor. She stood watching the cat lap up its milk, mouthful by mouthful; then it stretched itself out again with extraordinary grace.

Sara, standing at a little distance, watched her. Then she imitated her.

'There, poor puss, there, poor puss,' she repeated. 'As you rock the cradle, Maggie,' she added.

Maggie raised her arms as if to ward off some implacable destiny; then let them fall. Sara smiled as she watched her; then tears brimmed, fell and ran slowly down her cheeks. But as she put up her hand to wipe them there was a sound of knocking; somebody was hammering on the door of the next house. The hammering stopped. Then it began again – hammer, hammer, hammer.

They listened.

'Upcher's come home drunk and wants to be let in,' said Maggie. The knocking ceased. Then it began again.

Sara dried her eyes, roughly, energetically.

'Bring up your children on a desert island where the ships only come when the moon's full!' she exclaimed.

'Or have none?' said Maggie. A window was thrown open. A woman's voice was heard shrieking abuse at the man. He bawled back in a thick drunken voice from the door-step. Then the door slammed.

They listened.

'Now he'll stagger against the wall and be sick,' said Maggie. They could hear heavy footsteps lurching up the stairs in the next house. Then there was silence.

Maggie crossed the room to shut the window. The great windows of the factory opposite were all lit up; it looked like a palace of glass with thin black bars across it. A glaze of yellow light lit up the lower halves of the houses opposite; the slate roofs shone blue, for the sky hung down in a heavy canopy of yellow light. Footsteps tapped on the pavement, for people were still walking in the street. Far off a voice was crying hoarsely. Maggie leant out. The night was windy and warm.

'What's he crying?' she said.

The voice came nearer and nearer.

'Death . . .?' she said.

'Death . . .?' said Sara. They leant out. But they could not hear the rest of the sentence. Then a man who was wheeling a barrow along the street shouted up to them:

'The King's dead!'

1911

The sun was rising. Very slowly it came up over the horizon shaking out light. But the sky was so vast, so cloudless, that to fill it with light took time. Very gradually the clouds turned blue; leaves on forest trees sparkled; down below a flower shone; eyes of beasts – tigers, monkeys, birds – sparkled. Slowly the world emerged from darkness. The sea became like the skin of an innumerable scaled fish, glittering gold. Here in the South of France the furrowed vineyards caught the light; the little vines turned purple and yellow; and the sun coming through the slats of the blinds striped the white wall. Maggie, standing at the window, looked down on the courtyard, and saw her husband's book cracked across with shadow from the vine above; and the glass that stood beside him glowed yellow. Cries of peasants working came through the open window.

The sun, crossing the Channel, beat vainly on the blanket of thick sea mist. Light slowly permeated the haze over London; struck on the statues in Parliament Square, and on the Palace where the flag flew though the King, borne under a white and blue Union Jack, lay in the caverns at Frogmore. It was hotter than ever. Horses' noses hissed as they drank from the troughs; their hoofs made ridges hard and brittle as plaster on the country roads. Fires tearing over the moors left charcoal twigs behind them. It was August, the holiday season. The glass roofs of the great railway stations were globes incandescent with light. Travellers watched the hands of the round yellow clocks as they followed porters, wheeling portmanteaus, with dogs on leashes. In all the stations trains were ready to bore their way through England; to the North, to the South, to the West. Now the guard standing with his hand raised dropped his flag and the tea-urn slid past. Off the trains swung through the public gardens with asphalt paths; past the factories; into open country. Men standing on bridges fishing looked up; horses cantered; women came to doors and shaded their eyes; the shadow of the smoke floated over the corn, looped down and caught a tree. And on they passed.

In the station yard at Wittering, Mrs Chinnery's old victoria stood waiting. The train was late; it was very hot. William the gardener sat on the box in his buff-coloured coat with the plated buttons flicking the flies off. The flies were troublesome. They had gathered in little brown clusters on the horses' ears. He flicked his whip; the old mare stamped her hoofs; and shook her ears, for the flies had settled again. It was very hot. The sun beat down on the station yard, on the carts and flies and traps waiting for the train. At last the signal dropped; a puff of smoke blew over the hedge; and in a minute people came streaming out into the yard, and here was Miss Pargiter carrying her bag in her hand and a white umbrella. William touched his hat.

'Sorry to be so late,' said Eleanor, smiling up at him, for she knew him; she came every year.

She put her bag on the seat and sat back under the shade of her white umbrella. The leather of the carriage was hot behind her back; it was very hot – hotter even than Toledo. They turned into the High Street; the heat seemed to make everything drowsy and silent. The broad street was full of traps and carts with the reins hanging loose and the horses' heads drooping. But after the din of the foreign market-places how quiet it seemed! Men in gaiters were leaning against the walls; the shops had their awnings out; the pavement was barred with shadow. They had parcels to fetch. At the fishmonger's they stopped; and a damp white parcel was handed out to them. At the ironmonger's they stopped; and William came back with a scythe. Then they stopped at the chemist's; but there they had to wait, because the lotion was not yet ready.

Eleanor sat back under the shade of her white umbrella. The air seemed to hum with the heat. The air seemed to smell of soap and chemicals. How thoroughly people wash in England, she thought, looking at the yellow soap, the green soap, and the pink soap in the chemist's window. In Spain she had hardly washed at all; she had dried herself with a pocket handkerchief standing among the white dry stones of the Guadalquivir. In Spain it was all parched and shrivelled. But here – she looked down the High Street – every shop was full of vegetables; of shining silver fish; of yellow-clawed, soft-breasted chickens; of buckets, rakes and wheel-barrows. And how friendly people were!

She noticed how often hats were touched; hands were grasped; people stopped, talking, in the middle of the road. But now the chemist came out with a large bottle wrapped in tissue paper. It was stowed away under the scythe.

'Midges very bad this year, William?' she asked, recognizing the lotion.

'Tarrible bad, miss, tarrible,' he said, touching his hat. There hadn't been such a drought since the Jubilee she understood him to say; but his accent, his sing-song and Dorsetshire rhythm, made it difficult to catch what he said. Then he flicked his whip and they drove on; past the market cross; past the red brick town hall, with the arches under it; along a street of bow-windowed eighteenth century houses, the residences of doctors and solicitors; past the pond with chains linking white posts together and a horse drinking; and so out into the country. The road was laid with soft white dust; the hedges, hung with wreaths of travellers' joy, seemed also thick with dust. The old horse settled down into his mechanical jog-trot, and Eleanor lay back under her white umbrella.

Every summer she came to visit Morris at his mother-in-law's house. Seven times, eight times she had come she counted; but this year it was different. This year everything was different. Her father was dead; her house was shut up; she had no attachment at the moment anywhere. As she jolted through the hot lanes she thought drowsily, What shall I do now? Live there? she asked herself, as she passed a very respectable Georgian villa in the middle of a street. No, not in a village she said to herself; and they jogged through the village. What about that house then, she said to herself, looking at a house with a verandah among some trees. But then she thought, I should turn into a grey-haired lady cutting flowers with a pair of scissors and tapping at cottage doors. She did not want to tap at cottage doors. And the clergyman – a clergyman was wheeling his bicycle up the hill – would come to tea with her. But she did not want the clergyman to come to tea with her. How spick and span it all is she thought; for they were passing through the village. The little gardens were bright with red and yellow flowers. Then they began to meet village people; a procession. Some of the women carried parcels; there was a gleaming silver object on the quilt of a perambulator; and one old man clasped a hairy-headed coco-nut to his breast. There had been a Fête she sup-

posed; here it was, returning. They drew to the side of the road as the carriage trotted past, and cast steady curious looks at the lady sitting under her green and white umbrella. Now they came to a white gate; trotted briskly down a short avenue; and drew up with a flourish of the whip in front of two slender columns; door-scrapers like bristling hedgehogs; and a wide open hall door.

She waited for a moment in the hall. Her eyes were dimmed after the glare of the road. Everything seemed pale and frail and friendly. The rugs were faded; the pictures were faded. Even the Admiral in his cocked hat over the fireplace wore a curious look of faded urbanity. In Greece one was always going back two thousand years. Here it was always the eighteenth century. Like everything English, she thought, laying down her umbrella on the refectory table beside the china bowl, with dried rose leaves in it, the past seemed near, domestic, friendly.

The door opened. 'Oh Eleanor!' her sister-in-law exclaimed, running into the hall in her fly-away summer clothes, 'How nice to see you! How brown you look! Come into the cool!'

She led her into the drawing-room. The drawing-room piano was strewn with white baby-linen; pink and green fruits glimmered in glass bottles.

'We're in such a mess,' said Celia, sinking on to the sofa. 'Lady St Austell has only just this minute gone, and the Bishop.'

She fanned herself with a sheet of paper.

'But it's been a great success. We had the bazaar in the garden. They acted.' It was a programme with which she was fanning herself.

'A play?' said Eleanor.

'Yes, a scene from Shakespeare,' said Celia. '*Midsummer-Night? As You Like It?* I forget which. Miss Green got it up. Happily it was so fine. Last year it poured. But how my feet are aching!' The long window opened on to the lawn. Eleanor could see people dragging tables.

'What an undertaking!' she said.

'It was!' Celia panted. 'We had Lady St Austell and the Bishop, coco-nut shies and a pig; but I think it all went off very well. They enjoyed it.'

'For the Church?' Eleanor asked.

'Yes. The new steeple,' said Celia.

'What a business!' said Eleanor again. She looked out on to the lawn. The grass was already scorched and yellow; the laurel bushes looked shrivelled. Tables were standing against the laurel bushes. Morris passed, dragging a table.

'Was it nice in Spain?' Celia was asking. 'Did you see wonderful things?'

'Oh yes!' Eleanor exclaimed. 'I saw ...' She stopped. She had seen wonderful things – buildings, mountains, a red city in a plain. But how could she describe it?

'You must tell me all about it afterwards,' said Celia getting up. 'It's time we got ready. But I'm afraid,' she said, toiling rather painfully up the broad staircase, 'I must ask you to be careful, because we're very short of water. The well. ...' she stopped. The well, Eleanor remembered, always gave out in a hot summer. They walked together down the broad passage, past the old yellow globe which stood under the pleasant eighteenth century picture of all the little Chinnerys in long drawers and nankeen trousers standing round their father and mother in the garden. Celia paused with her hand on the bedroom door. The sound of doves cooing came in through the open window.

'We're putting you in the Blue room this time,' she said. Generally Eleanor had the Pink room. She glanced in. 'I hope you've got everything—' she began.

'Yes, I'm sure I've got everything,' said Eleanor, and Celia left her.

The maid had already unpacked her things. There they were – laid on the bed. Eleanor took off her dress, and stood in her white petticoat washing herself, methodically but carefully, since they were short of water. The English sun still made her face prickle all over where the Spanish sun had burnt it. Her neck had been cut off from her chest as if it had been painted brown, she thought, as she slipped on her evening dress in front of the looking-glass. She twisted her thick hair, with the grey strand in it, rapidly into a coil; hung the jewel, a red blob like congealed raspberry jam with a gold seed in the centre, round her neck; and gave one glance at the woman who had been for fifty-five years so familiar that she no longer saw her – Eleanor Pargiter. That she was getting old was obvious; there were wrinkles across her forehead; hollows and creases where the flesh used to be firm.

And what was my good point? she asked herself, running the comb once more through her hair. My eyes? Her eyes laughed back at her as she looked at them. My eyes, yes, she thought. Somebody had once praised her eyes. She made herself open them instead of screwing them together. Round each eye were several little white strokes, where she had crinkled them up to avoid the glare on the Acropolis, at Naples, at Granada and Toledo. But that's over, she thought, people praising my eyes, and finished her dressing.

She stood for a moment looking at the burnt, dry lawn. The grass was almost yellow; the elm trees were beginning to turn brown; red-and-white cows were munching on the far side of the sunk hedge. But England was disappointing, she thought; it was small; it was pretty; she felt no affection for her native land – none whatever. Then she went down, for she wanted if possible to see Morris alone.

But he was not alone. He got up as she came in and introduced her to a stoutish, white-haired old man in a dinner-jacket.

'You know each other, don't you?' said Morris.

'Eleanor – Sir William Whatney.' He put a little stress humorously upon the 'Sir' which for a moment confused Eleanor.

'We used to know each other,' said Sir William, coming forward and smiling as he took her hand.

She looked at him. Could it be William Whatney – old Dubbin – who used to come to Abercorn Terrace years ago? It was. She had not seen him since he went to India.

But are we all like that? she asked herself, looking from the grisled, crumpled red-and-yellow face of the boy she had known – he was almost hairless – at her own brother Morris. He looked bald and thin; but surely he was in the prime of life, as she was herself? Or had they all suddenly become old fogies like Sir William? Then her nephew North and her niece Peggy came in with their mother and they went in to dinner. Old Mrs Chinnery dined upstairs.

How has Dubbin become Sir William Whatney? she wondered, glancing at him as they ate the fish that had been brought up in the damp parcel. She had last seen him – in a boat on the river. They had gone for a picnic; they had supped on an island in the middle of the river. Maidenhead, was it?

They were talking about the Fête. Craster had won the pig; Mrs Grice had won the silver-plated salver.

'That's what I saw on the perambulator,' said Eleanor. 'I met the Fête coming back,' she explained. She described the procession. And they talked about the Fête.

'Don't you envy my sister-in-law?' said Celia, turning to Sir William. 'She's just back from a tour in Greece.'

'Indeed!' said Sir William. 'Which part of Greece?'

'We went to Athens, then to Olympia, then to Delphi,' Eleanor began, reciting the usual formula. They were on purely formal terms evidently – she and Dubbin.

'My brother-in-law, Edward,' Celia explained, 'takes these delightful tours.'

'You remember Edward?' said Morris. 'Weren't you up with him?'

'No, he was junior to me,' said Sir William. 'But I've heard of him, of course. He's – let me think – what is he – a great swell, isn't he?'

'Oh, he's at the top of his tree,' said Morris.

He was not jealous of Edward, Eleanor thought; but there was a certain note in his voice which told her that he was comparing his career with Edward's.

'They loved him,' she said. She smiled; she saw Edward lecturing troops of devout school mistresses on the Acropolis. Out came their notebooks and down they scribbled every word he said. But he had been very generous; very kind; he had looked after her all the time.

'Did you meet anyone at the Embassy?' Sir William asked her. Then he corrected himself. 'Not an Embassy though, is it?'

'No. Athens is not an Embassy,' said Morris. Here there was a diversion; what was the difference between an Embassy and a Legation? Then they began to discuss the situation in the Balkans.

'There's going to be trouble there in the near future,' Sir William was saying. He turned to Morris; they discussed the situation in the Balkans.

Eleanor's attention wandered. What's he done? she wondered. Certain words and gestures brought him back to her as he had been thirty years ago. There were relics of the old Dubbin if one half-shut one's eyes. She half-shut her eyes. Suddenly she remembered – it was *he* who had praised her eyes. 'Your sister has

the brightest eyes I ever saw,' he had said. Morris had told her. And she had hidden her face behind a newspaper in the train going home to conceal her pleasure. She looked at him again. He was talking. She listened. He seemed too big for the quiet, English dining-room; his voice boomed out. He wanted an audience.

He was telling a story. He spoke in clipped, nervous sentences as if there were a ring round them – a style she admired, but she had missed the beginning. His glass was empty.

'Give Sir William some more wine,' Celia whispered to the nervous parlourmaid. There was some juggling with decanters on the sideboard. Celia frowned nervously. A girl from the village who doesn't know her job, Eleanor reflected. The story was reaching its climax; but she had missed several links.

'. . . and I found myself in an old pair of riding-breeches standing under a peacock umbrella; and all the good people were crouching with their heads to the ground. "Good Lord," I said to myself, "if they only knew what a bally ass I feel!" ' He held out his glass to be filled. 'That's how we were taught our job in those days,' he added.

He was boasting, of course; that was natural. He came back to England after ruling a district 'about the size of Ireland', as they always said; and nobody had ever heard of him. She had a feeling that she would hear a great many more stories that sailed serenely to his own advantage, during the week-end. But he talked very well. He had done a great many interesting things. She wished that Morris would tell stories too. She wished that he would assert himself instead of leaning back and passing his hand – the hand with the cut on it – over his forehead.

Ought I to have urged him to go to the Bar? she thought. Her father had been against it. But once it's done there it is; he married; the children came; he had to go on, whether he wanted to or not. How irrevocable things are, she thought. We make our experiments, then they make theirs. She looked at her nephew North and at her niece Peggy. They sat opposite her with the sun on their faces. Their perfectly healthy egg-shell faces looked extraordinarily young. Peggy's blue dress stuck out like a child's muslin frock; North was still a brown-eyed cricketing boy. He was listening intently; Peggy was looking down at her plate. She had the non-committal look which well brought up children have when they listen to the talk of their elders. She

might be amused; or bored? Eleanor could not be sure which it was.

'There he goes,' Peggy said, suddenly looking up. 'The owl ...' she said, catching Eleanor's eye. Eleanor turned to look out of the window behind her. She missed the owl; she saw the heavy trees, gold in the setting sun; and the cows slowly moving as they munched their way across the meadow.

'You can time him,' said Peggy, 'he's so regular.' Then Celia made a move.

'Shall we leave the gentlemen to their politics,' she said, 'and have our coffee on the terrace?' and they shut the door upon the gentlemen and their politics.

'I'll fetch my glasses,' said Eleanor, and she went upstairs.

She wanted to see the owl before it got too dark. She was becoming more and more interested in birds. It was a sign of old age, she supposed, as she went into her bedroom. An old maid who washes and watches birds, she said to herself as she looked in the glass. There were her eyes – they still seemed to her rather bright, in spite of the lines round them – the eyes she had shaded in the railway carriage because Dubbin praised them. But now I'm labelled, she thought – an old maid who washes and watches birds. That's what they think I am. But I'm not – I'm not in the least like that, she said. She shook her head, and turned away from the glass. It was a nice room; shady, civilized, cool after the bedrooms in foreign inns, with marks on the wall where someone had squashed bugs and men brawling under the window. But where were her glasses? Put away in some drawer? She turned to look for them.

'Did father say Sir William was in love with her?' Peggy asked as they waited on the terrace.

'Oh I don't know about that,' said Celia. 'But I wish they could have married. I wish she had children of her own. And then they could have settled here,' she added. 'He's such a delightful man.'

Peggy was silent. There was a pause.

Celia resumed:

'I hope you were polite to the Robinsons this afternoon, dreadful as they are. ...'

'They give ripping parties anyhow,' said Peggy.

' "Ripping, ripping," ' her mother complained half laughing. 'I

wish you wouldn't pick up all North's slang, my dear. . . . Oh, here's Eleanor,' she broke off.

Eleanor came out on to the terrace with her glasses, and sat down beside Celia. It was still very warm; it was still light enough to see the hills in the distance.

'He'll be back in a minute,' said Peggy, drawing up a chair. 'He'll come along that hedge.'

She pointed to the dark line of hedge that went across the meadow. Eleanor focussed her glasses and waited.

'Now,' said Celia, pouring out the coffee. 'There are so many things I want to ask you.' She paused. She always had a hoard of questions to ask; she had not seen Eleanor since April. In four months questions accumulated. Out they came drop by drop.

'In the first place,' she began. 'No. . . .' She rejected that question in favour of another.

'What's all this about Rose?' she asked.

'What?' said Eleanor absentmindedly, altering the focus of her glasses. 'It's getting too dark,' she said; the field was blurred.

'Morris says she's been had up in a police-court,' said Celia. She dropped her voice slightly though they were alone.

'She threw a brick—' said Eleanor. She focussed her glasses on the hedge again. She held them poised in case the owl should come that way again.

'Will she be put in prison?' Peggy asked quickly.

'Not this time,' said Eleanor. 'Next time— Ah, here he comes!' she broke off. The blunt-headed bird came swinging along the hedge. He looked almost white in the dusk. Eleanor got him within the circle of her lens. He held a little black spot in front of him.

'He's got a mouse in his claws!' she exclaimed.

'He's got a nest in the steeple,' said Peggy. The owl swooped out of the field of vision.

'Now I can't see him any more,' said Eleanor. She lowered her glasses. They were silent for a moment, sipping their coffee. Celia was thinking of her next question; Eleanor anticipated her.

'Tell me about William Whatney,' she said. 'When I last saw him he was a slim young man in a boat.' Peggy burst out laughing.

'That must have been ages ago!' she said.

'Not so very long,' said Eleanor. She felt rather nettled.

'Well—' she reflected, 'twenty years – twenty-five years perhaps.'

It seemed a very short time to her; but then, she thought, it was before Peggy was born. She could only be sixteen or seventeen.

'Isn't he a delightful man?' Celia exclaimed. 'He was in India, you know. Now he's retired, and we do hope he'll take a house here; but Morris thinks he'd find it too dull.'

They sat silent for a moment, looking out over the meadow. The cows coughed now and then as they munched and moved a step further through the grass. A sweet scent of cows and grass was wafted up to them.

'It's going to be another hot day tomorrow,' said Peggy. The sky was perfectly smooth; it seemed made of innumerable grey-blue atoms the colour of an Italian officer's cloak; until it reached the horizon where there was a long bar of pure green. Everything looked very settled; very still; very pure. There was not a single cloud, and the stars were not yet showing.

It was small; it was smug; it was petty after Spain, but still, now that the sun had sunk and the trees were massed together without separate leaves it had its beauty, Eleanor thought. The downs were becoming larger and simpler; they were becoming part of the sky.

'How lovely it is!' she exclaimed, as if she were making amends to England after Spain.

'If only Mr Robinson doesn't build!' sighed Celia; and Eleanor remembered – they were the local scourge; rich people who threatened to build. 'I did my best to be polite to them at the bazaar today,' Celia continued. 'Some people won't ask them; but I say one must be polite to neighbours in the country. . . .'

Then she paused. 'There are so many things I want to ask you,' she said. The bottle was tilted on its end again. Eleanor waited obediently.

'Have you had an offer for Abercorn Terrace yet?' Celia demanded. Drop, drop, drop, out her questions came.

'Not yet,' said Eleanor. 'The agent wants me to cut it up into flats.'

Celia pondered. Then she hopped on again.

'And now about Maggie – when's her baby going to be born?'

'In November, I think,' said Eleanor. 'In Paris,' she added.

'I hope it'll be all right,' said Celia. 'But I do wish it could have

been born in England.' She reflected again. 'Her children will be French, I suppose?' she said.

'Yes; French, I suppose,' said Eleanor. She was looking at the green bar; it was fading; it was turning blue. It was becoming night.

'Everybody says he's a very nice felow,' said Celia. 'But René – René,' her accent was bad, '—it doesn't sound like a man's name.'

'You can call him Renny,' said Peggy, pronouncing it in the English way.

'But that reminds me of Ronny; and I don't like Ronny. We had a stable-boy called Ronny.'

'Who stole the hay,' said Peggy. They were silent again. 'It's such a pity—' Celia began. Then she stopped. The maid had come to clear away the coffee.

'It's a wonderful night, isn't it?' said Celia, adapting her voice to the presence of servants. 'It looks as if it would never rain again. In which case I don't know. . . .' And she went on prattling about the drought; about the lack of water. The well always ran dry. Eleanor, looking at the hills, hardly listened. 'Oh, but there's quite enough for everybody at present,' she heard Celia saying. And for some reason she held the sentence suspended without a meaning in her mind's ear, '. . . quite enough for everybody at present,' she repeated. After all the foreign languages she had been hearing, it sounded to her pure English. What a lovely language, she thought, saying over to herself again the commonplace words, spoken by Celia quite simply, but with some indescribable burr in the r's, for the Chinnerys had lived in Dorsetshire since the beginning of time.

The maid had gone.

'What was I saying?' Celia resumed. 'I was saying, it's such a pity. Yes. . . .' But there was a sound of voices; a scent of cigar smoke; the gentlemen were upon them. 'Oh, here they are!' she broke off. And the chairs were pulled up and rearranged.

They sat in a semicircle looking across the meadows at the fading hills. The broad bar of green that lay across the horizon had vanished. Only a tinge was left in the sky. It had become peaceful and cool; in them too something seemed to be smoothed out. There was no need to talk. The owl flew down the meadow again; they could just see the white of his wing against the dark of the hedge.

'There he goes,' said North, puffing at a cigar which was his first, Eleanor guessed, Sir William's gift. The elm trees had become dead black against the sky. Their leaves hung in a fretted pattern like black lace with holes in it. Through a hole Eleanor saw the point of a star. She looked up. There was another.

'It's going to be a fine day tomorrow,' said Morris, knocking out his pipe against his shoe. Far away on a distant road there was a rattle of cart-wheels; then a chorus of voices singing – country people going home. This is England, Eleanor thought to herself; she felt as if she were slowly sinking into some fine mesh made of branches shaking, hills growing dark, and leaves hanging like black lace with stars among them. But a bat swooped low over their heads.

'I hate bats!' Celia exclaimed, raising her hand to her head nervously.

'Do you?' said Sir William. 'I rather like them.' His voice was quiet and almost melancholy. Now Celia will say, They get into one's hair, Eleanor thought.

'They get into one's hair,' Celia said.

'But I haven't any hair,' said Sir William. His bald head, his large face gleamed out in the darkness.

The bat swooped again, skimming the ground at their feet. A little cool air stirred at their ankles. The trees had become part of the sky. There was no moon, but the stars were coming out. There's another, Eleanor thought, gazing at a twinkling light ahead of her. But it was too low; too yellow; it was another house she realized, not a star. And then Celia began talking to Sir William, whom she wanted to settle near them; and Lady St Austell had told her that the Grange was to let. Was that the Grange, Eleanor wondered, looking at a light, or a star? And they went on talking.

Tired of her own company, old Mrs Chinnery had come down early. There she sat in the drawing-room waiting. She had made a formal entry, but there was nobody there. Arrayed in her old lady's dress of black satin, with a lace cap on her head, she sat waiting. Her hawk-like nose was curved in her shrivelled cheeks; a little red rim showed on one of her drooping eyelids.

'Why don't they come in?' she said peevishly to Ellen, the

discreet black maid who stood behind her. Ellen went to the window and tapped on the pane.

Celia stopped talking and turned round. 'That's Mama,' she said. 'We must go in.' She got up and pushed back her chair.

After the dark, the drawing-room with its lamps lit had the effect of a stage. Old Mrs Chinnery sitting in her wheeled chair with her ear trumpet seemed to sit there awaiting homage. She looked exactly the same; not a day older; as vigorous as ever. As Eleanor bent to give her the customary kiss, life once more took on its familiar proportions. So she had bent, night after night, over her father. She was glad to stoop down; it made her feel younger herself. She knew the whole procedure by heart. They, the middle-aged, deferred to the very old; the very old were courteous to them; and then came the usual pause. They had nothing to say to her; she had nothing to say to them. What happened next? Eleanor saw the old lady's eyes suddenly brighten. What made the eyes of an old woman of ninety turn blue? Cards? Yes. Celia had fetched the green baize table; Mrs Chinnery had a passion for whist. But she too had her ceremony; she too had her manners.

'Not tonight,' she said, making a little gesture as if to push away the table. 'I am sure it will bore Sir William?' She gave a nod in the direction of the large man who stood there seeming a little outside the family party.

'Not at all. Not at all,' he said with alacrity. 'Nothing would please me more,' he assured her.

'You're a good fellow, Dubbin, Eleanor thought. And they drew up the chairs; and dealt the cards; and Morris chaffed his mother-in-law down her ear-trumpet and they played rubber after rubber. North read a book; Peggy strummed on the piano; and Celia, dozing over her embroidery, now and then gave a sudden start and put her hand over her mouth. At last the door opened stealthily. Ellen, the discreet black maid stood behind Mrs Chinnery's chair, waiting. Mrs Chinnery pretended to ignore her, but the others were glad to stop. Ellen stepped forward and Mrs Chinnery, submitting, was wheeled off to the mysterious upper chamber of extreme old age. Her pleasure was over.

Celia yawned openly.

'The bazaar,' she said, rolling up her embroidery. 'I shall go to bed. Come, Peggy. Come, Eleanor.'

North jumped up with alacrity to open the door. Celia lit the brass candlesticks and began, rather heavily, to climb the stairs. Eleanor followed after. But Peggy lagged behind. Eleanor heard her whispering with her brother in the hall.

'Come along, Peggy,' Celia called back over the banister as she toiled upstairs. When she got to the landing at the top she stopped under the picture of the little Chinnery's and called back again rather sharply:

'Come, Peggy.' There was a pause. Then Peggy came, reluctantly. She kissed her mother obediently; but she did not look in the least sleepy. She looked extremely pretty and rather flushed. She did not mean to go to bed, Eleanor felt sure.

She went into her room and undressed. All the windows were open and she heard the trees rustling in the garden. It was so hot still that she lay in her nightgown on top of the bed with only the sheet over her. The candle burnt its little pear-shaped flame on the table by her side. She lay listening vaguely to the trees in the garden; and watched the shadow of a moth that dashed round and round the room. Either I must get up and shut the window or blow out the candle, she thought drowsily. She did not want to do either. She wanted to lie still. It was a relief to lie in the semi-darkness after the talk, after the cards. She could still see the cards falling; black, red and yellow; kings, queens and knaves; on a green baize table. She looked drowsily round her. A nice vase of flowers stood on the dressing-table; there was the polished wardrobe and a china box by her bedside. She lifted the lid. Yes; four biscuits and a pale piece of chocolate – in case she should be hungry in the night. Celia had provided books too, The Diary of a Nobody, Ruff's Tour in Northumberland and an odd volume of Dante, in case she should wish to read in the night. She took one of the books and laid it on the counterpane beside her. Perhaps because she had been travelling, it seemed as if the ship were still padding softly through the sea; as if the train were still swinging from side to side as it rattled across France. She felt as if things were moving past her as she lay stretched on the bed under the single sheet. But it's not the landscape any longer, she thought; it's people's lives, their changing lives.

The door of the pink bedroom shut. William Whatney coughed next door. She heard him cross the room. Now he was

standing by the window, smoking a last cigar. What's he thinking, she wondered – about India? – how he stood under a peacock umbrella? Then he began moving about the room, undressing. She could hear him take up a brush and put it down again on his dressing-table. And it's to him, she thought, remembering the wide sweep of his chin and the floating stains of pink and yellow that lay underneath it, that I owe that moment, which had been more than pleasure, when she hid her face behind the newspaper in the corner of the third-class railway carriage.

Now there were three moths dashing round the ceiling. They made a little tapping noise as they dashed round and round from corner to corner. If she left the window open much longer the room would be full of moths. A board creaked in the passage outside. She listened. Peggy, was it, escaping, to join her brother? She felt sure there was some scheme on foot. But she could only hear the heavy-laden branches moving up and down in the garden; a cow lowing; a bird chirping, and then, to her delight, the liquid call of an owl going from tree to tree looping them with silver.

She lay looking at the ceiling. A faint water mark appeared there. It was like a hill. It reminded her of one of the great desolate mountains in Greece or in Spain, which looked as if nobody had ever set foot there since the beginning of time.

She opened the book that lay on the counterpane. She hoped it was Ruff's Tour, or the Diary of a Nobody; but it was Dante, and she was too lazy to change it. She read a few lines, here and there. But her Italian was rusty; the meaning escaped her. There was a meaning however; a hook seemed to scratch the surface of her mind

> cheè per quanti si dice più lì nostro
> tanto possiede più di ben ciascuno.

What did that mean? She read the English translation.

> For by so many more there are who say 'ours'
> So much the more of good doth each possess.

Brushed lightly by her mind that was watching the moths on the ceiling, and listening to the call of the owl as it looped from

tree to tree with its liquid cry, the words did not give out their full meaning, but seemed to hold something furled up in the hard shell of the archaic Italian. I'll read it one of these days, she thought, shutting the book. When I've pensioned Crosby off, when. ... Should she take another house? Should she travel? Should she go to India, at last? Sir William was getting into bed next door, his life was over; hers was beginning. No, I don't mean to take another house, not another house, she thought, looking at the stain on the ceiling. Again the sense came to her of a ship padding softly through the waves; of a train swinging from side to side down a railway-line. Things can't go on for ever, she thought. Things pass, things change, she thought, looking up at the ceiling. And where are we going? Where? Where? ... The moths were dashing round the ceiling: the book slipped on to the floor. Craster won the pig, but who was it won the silver salver? she mused; made an effort; turned round, and blew out the candle. Darkness reigned.

1913

It was January. Snow was falling; snow had fallen all day. The sky spread like a grey goose's wing from which feathers were falling all over England. The sky was nothing but a flurry of falling flakes. Lanes were levelled; hollows filled; the snow clogged the streams; obscured windows, and lay wedged against doors. There was a faint murmur in the air, a slight crepitation, as if the air itself were turning to snow; otherwise all was silent, save when a sheep coughed, snow flopped from a branch, or slipped in an avalanche down some roof in London. Now and again a shaft of light spread slowly across the sky as a car drove through the muffled roads. But as the night wore on, snow covered the wheel ruts; softened to nothingness the marks of the traffic, and coated monuments, palaces and statues with a thick vestment of snow.

It was still snowing when the young man came from the House Agents to see over Abercorn Terrace. The snow cast a hard white glare upon the walls of the bathroom, showed up the cracks on the enamel bath, and the stains on the wall. Eleanor stood looking out of the window. The trees in the back garden were heavily lined with snow; all the roofs were softly moulded with snow; it was still falling. She turned. The young man turned too. The light was unbecoming to them both, yet the snow – she saw it through the window at the end of the passage – was beautiful, falling.

Mr Grice turned to her as they went downstairs,

'The fact is, our clients expect more lavatory accommodation nowadays,' he said, stopping outside a bedroom door.

Why can't he say 'baths' and have done with it, she thought. Slowly she went downstairs. Now she could see the snow falling through the panels of the hall door. As he went downstairs, she noticed the red ears which stood out over his high collar; and the neck which he had washed imperfectly in some sink at Wandsworth. She was annoyed; as he went round the house, sniffing and peering, he had indicted their cleanliness, their

humanity; and he used absurd long words. He was hauling himself up into the class above him, she supposed, by means of long words. Now he stepped cautiously over the body of the sleeping dog; took his hat from the hall table, and went down the front door-steps in his business man's buttoned boots, leaving yellow footprints in the thick white cushion of snow. A four-wheeler was waiting.

Eleanor turned. There was Crosby, dodging about in her best bonnet and mantle. She had been following Eleanor about the house like a dog all the morning; the odious moment could no longer be put off. Her four-wheeler was at the door; they had to say good-bye.

'Well, Crosby, it all looks very empty, doesn't it?' said Eleanor, looking in at the empty drawing-room. The white light of the snow glared in on the walls. It showed up the marks on the walls where the furniture had stood, where the pictures had hung.

'It does, Miss Eleanor,' said Crosby. She stood looking too. Eleanor knew that she was going to cry. She did not want her to cry. She did not want to cry herself.

'I can still see you all sitting round that table, Miss Eleanor,' said Crosby. But the table had gone. Morris had taken this; Delia had taken that; everything had been shared out and separated.

'And the kettle that wouldn't boil,' said Eleanor. 'D'you remember that?' She tried to laugh.

'Oh, Miss Eleanor,' said Crosby, shaking her head, 'I remember everything!' The tears were forming; Eleanor looked away into the further room.

There too were marks on the wall, where the book-case had stood, where the writing-table had stood. She thought of herself sitting there, drawing a pattern on the blotting-paper; digging a hole, adding up tradesmen's books. . . . Then she turned. There was Crosby. Crosby was crying. The mixture of emotions was positively painful; she was so glad to be quit of it all, but for Crosby it was the end of everything.

She had known every cupboard, flagstone, chair and table in that large rambling house, not from five or six feet of distance as they had known it; but from her knees, as she scrubbed and polished; she had known every groove, stain, fork, knife, napkin and cupboard. They and their doings had made her entire world.

And now she was going off, alone, to a single room at Richmond.

'I should think you'd be glad to be out of that basement anyhow, Crosby,' said Eleanor, turning into the hall again. She had never realized how dark, how low it was, until, looking at it with 'our Mr Grice,' she had felt ashamed.

'It was my home for forty years, Miss,' said Crosby. The tears were running. For forty years! Eleanor thought with a start. She had been a little girl of thirteen or fourteen when Crosby came to them, looking so stiff and smart. Now her blue gnat's eyes protruded and her cheeks were sunk.

Crosby was stooping to put Rover on the chain.

'You're sure you want him?' said Eleanor, looking at the rather smelly, wheezy and unattractive old dog. 'We could easily find a nice home for him in the country.'

'Oh, Miss, don't ask me to give him up!' said Crosby. Tears checked her speech. Tears were running freely down her cheeks. For all Eleanor could do to prevent it, tears formed in her eyes too.

'Dear Crosby, good-bye,' she said. She bent and kissed her. She had a curious dry quality of skin she noticed. But her own tears were falling. Then Crosby, holding Rover on the chain, began to edge sideways down the slippery steps. Eleanor, holding the door open, looked after her. It was dreadful moment; unhappy; muddled; altogether wrong. Crosby was so miserable; she was so glad. Yet as she held the door open her tears formed and fell. They had all lived here; she had stood here to wave Morris to school; there was the little garden in which they used to plant crocuses. And now Crosby, with flakes of snow falling on her black bonnet, climbed into the four-wheeler, holding Rover in her arms. Eleanor shut the door and went in.

Snow was falling as the cab trotted along the streets. There were long yellow ruts on the pavement where people, shopping, had pressed it into slush. It was beginning to thaw slightly; loads of snow slipped off the roofs and fell on to the pavement. Little boys, too, were snowballing; one of them threw a ball which struck the cab as it passed. But when it turned into Richmond Green the whole of the vast space was completely white. Nobody seemed to have crossed the snow there; everything was white. The grass was white; the trees were white; the railings

were white; the only marks in the whole vista were the rooks, sitting huddled black on the tree tops. The cab trotted on.

The carts had churned the snow to a yellowish clotted mixture by the time the cab stopped in front of the little house off the Green. Crosby, carrying Rover in her arms lest his feet should mark the stairs, went up the steps. There was Louisa Burt standing to welcome her; and Mr Bishop, the lodger from the top floor who had been a butler. He lent a hand with the luggage, and Crosby followed after, to her little room.

Her room was at the top, and at the back, overlooking the garden. It was small, but when she had unpacked her things it was comfortable enough. It had a look of Abercorn Terrace. Indeed for many years she had been hoarding odds and ends with a view to her retirement. Indian elephants, silver vases, the walrus that she had found in the waste-paper backet one morning, when the guns were firing for the old Queen's funeral – there they all were. She ranged them askew on the mantelpiece, and when she had hung the portraits of the family – some in wedding-dress, some in wigs and gowns, and Mr Martin in his uniform in the middle because he was her favourite – it was quite like home.

But whether it was the change to Richmond, or whether he had caught cold in the snow, Rover sickened immediately. He refused his food. His nose was hot. His eczema broke out again. When she tried to take him shopping with her next morning he rolled over with his feet in the air as if he begged to be left alone. Mr Bishop had to tell Mrs Crosby – for she wore the courtesy title in Richmond – that in his opinion the poor old chap (here he patted his head) was better out of the way.

'Come along with me, my dear,' said Mrs Burt, putting her arm on Crosby's shoulder, 'and let Bishop do it.'

'He won't suffer, I can assure you,' said Mr Bishop, rising from his knees. He had put her Ladyship's dogs to sleep scores of time before this. 'He'll just take one sniff' – Mr Bishop had his pocket-handkerchief in his hand – 'and he'll be off in a jiffy.'

'It'll be for his good, Annie,' Mrs Burt added, trying to draw her away.

Indeed, the poor old dog looked very miserable. But Crosby shook her head. He had wagged his tail; his eyes were open. He was alive. There was a gleam of what she had long considered a

smile on his face. He depended on her, she felt. She was not going to hand him over to strangers. She sat by his side for three days and nights; she fed him with a teaspoon on Brand's Essence; but at last he refused to open his lips; his body grew stiffer and stiffer; a fly walked across his nose without its twitching. This was in the early morning with the sparrows twittering on the trees outside.

'It's a mercy she's got something to distract her,' said Mrs Burt as Crosby passed the kitchen window the day after the funeral in her best mantle and bonnet; for it was Thursday, when she fetched Mr Pargiter's socks from Ebury Street. 'But he ought to have been put down long ago,' she added, turning back to the sink. His breath had smelt.

Crosby took the District Railway to Sloane Square and then she walked. She walked slowly, with her elbows jutting out from her sides as if to protect herself from the haphazardry of the streets. She still looked sad; but the change from Richmond to Ebury Street did her good. She felt more herself in Ebury Street than in Richmond. A common sort of people lived in Richmond she always felt. Here the ladies and gentlemen had the same kind of way with them. She glanced approvingly into the shops as she passed. And General Arbuthnot, who used to visit the Master, lived in Ebury Street she reflected as she turned into that gloomy thoroughfare. He was dead now; Louisa had shown her the notice in the papers. But when he was alive, he had lived here. She had reached Mr Martin's lodgings. She paused on the steps and adjusted her bonnet. She always had a word with Martin when she came to fetch his socks; it was one of her pleasures; and she enjoyed a gossip with Mrs Briggs, his landlady. Today she would have the pleasure of telling her of the death of Rover. Sidling cautiously down the area steps which were slippery with sleet she stood at the back door and range the bell.

Martin sat in his room reading his newspaper. The war in the Balkans was over; but there was more trouble brewing – that he was sure. Quite sure. He turned the page. The room was very dark with the sleet falling. And he could never read while he was waiting. Crosby was coming; he could hear voices in the

hall. How they gossiped! How they chattered! he thought i patiently. He threw the paper down and waited. Now she w coming; her hand was on the door. But what was he to say her? he wondered, as he saw the handle turning. He put dow the paper. He made use of the usual formula: 'Well, Crosb how's the world treating you?' as she came in.

She remembered Rover; and the tears started to her eyes.

Martin listened to the story; he wrinkled his brow sym pathetically. Then he got up, went into his bedroom, and cam back holding a pyjama jacket in his hand.

'What d'you call *that*, Crosby?' he said. He pointed to a hol under the collar, fringed with brown. Crosby adjusted her gol rimmed spectacles.

'A burn, sir,' she said with conviction.

'Brand new pyjamas; only worn them twice,' said Martin holding them extended. Crosby touched them. They were mad of the finest silk, she could tell.

'Tut – tut – tut!' she said, shaking her head.

'Will you please take this pyjama to Mrs What's-her-name, he went on, holding it out in front of him. He wanted to use a metaphor; but one had to be very literal and use only the simplest language, he remembered, when one talked to Crosby.

'Tell her to get another laundress,' he concluded, 'and senc the old one to the devil.'

Crosby gathered the injured pyjama tenderly to her breast; Mr Martin never could abide wool next the skin, she remem-bered. Martin paused. One must pass the time of the day with Crosby; but the death of Rover had seriously limited their topics of conversation.

'How's the rheumatics?' he asked, as she stood very upright at the door of the room with the pyjamas on her arm. She had grown distinctly smaller, he thought. She shook her head. Rich-mond was very low compared with Abercorn Terrace, she said Her face dropped. She was thinking of Rover, he supposed. He must get her mind off that; he could not bear tears.

'Seen Miss Eleanor's new flat?' he asked. Crosby had. But she did not like flats. In her opinion Miss Eleanor wore herself out.

'And the people's not worth it, sir,' she said, referring to the Zwinglers, Paravicinis and Cobbs who used to come to the back door for cast-off clothing in the old days.

Martin shook his head. He could not think what to say next.

He hated talking to servants; it always made him feel insincere. Either one simpers, or one's hearty, he was thinking. In either case it's a lie.

'And are you keeping pretty well yourself, Master Martin?' Crosby asked him, using the diminutive which was a perquisite of her long service.

'Not married yet, Crosby,' said Martin.

Crosby cast her eye round the room. It was a bachelor's apartment, with its leather chairs; its chessmen on top of a pile of books and its soda-water syphon on a tray. She ventured to say that she was sure that there were plenty of nice young ladies who would be very glad to take care of him.

'Ah, but I like lying in bed of a morning,' said Martin.

'You always did, sir,' she said, smiling. And then it was possible for Martin to take out his watch, step briskly to the window and exclaim as if he had suddenly remembered an appointment,

'By Jove, Crosby, I must be off!' and the door shut upon Crosby.

It was a lie. He had no engagement. One always lies to servants, he thought, looking out of the window. The mean outlines of the Ebury Street houses showed through the falling sleet. Everybody lies, he thought. His father had lied – after his death they had found letters from a woman called Mira tied up in his table-drawer. And he had seen Mira – a stout respectable lady who wanted help with her roof. Why had his father lied? What was the harm of keeping a mistress? And he had lied himself; about the room off the Fulham Road where he and Dodge and Erridge used to smoke cheap cigars and tell smutty stories. It was an abominable system, he thought; family life; Abercorn Terrace. No wonder the house would not let. It had one bathroom, and a basement; and there all those different people had lived, boxed up together, telling lies.

Then as he stood at the window looking at the little figures slinking along the wet pavement he saw Crosby come up the area steps with a parcel under her arm. She stood for a moment, like a frightened little animal, peering round her before she ventured to brave the dangers of the street. At last, off she trotted. He saw the snow falling on her black bonnet as she disappeared. He turned away.

1914

It was a brilliant spring; the day was radiant. Even the a seemed to have a burr in it as it touched the tree tops; it v brated, it rippled. The leaves were sharp and green. In th country old church clocks rasped out the hour; the rusty soun went over fields that were red with clover, and up went th rooks as if flung by the bells. Round they wheeled; then settle on the tree tops.

In London all was gallant and strident; the season was b ginning; horns hooted; the traffic roared; flags flew taut as trou in a stream. And from all the spires of all the London churches the fashionable saints of Mayfair, the dowdy saints o Kensington, the hoary saints of the city – the hour was pr claimed. The air over London seemed a rough sea of soun through which circles travelled. But the clocks were irregula as if the saints themselves were divided. There were pause silences.... Then the clocks struck again.

Here in Ebury Street some distant frail-voiced clock was strik ing. It was eleven. Martin, standing at his window, looked dow on the narrow street. The sun was bright; he was in the best o spirits; he was going to visit his stockbroker in the city. Hi affairs were turning out well. At one time, he was thinking, hi father had made a lot of money; then he lost it; then he made it but in the end he had done very well.

He stood at the window for a moment admiring a lady o fashion in a charming hat who was looking at a pot in th curiosity shop opposite. It was a blue pot on a Chinese stan with green brocade behind it. The sloping symmetrical body the depth of blue, the little cracks in the glaze pleased him. An the lady looking at the pot was also charming.

He took his hat and stick and went out into the street. H would walk part of the way to the City. 'The King of Spain' daughter' he hummed as he turned up Sloane Street, 'came t visit me. All for the sake of....' He looked into the shop windows as he passed. They were full of summer dresses

charming confections of green and gauze, and there were flights of hats stuck on little rods. '. . . all for the sake of' he hummed as he walked on, 'my silver nutmeg tree.' But what was a silver nutmeg tree he wondered? An organ was fluting its merry little jig further down the street. The organ moved round and round, shifted this way and that, as if the old man who played it were half dancing to the tune. A pretty servant girl ran up the area steps and gave him a penny. His supple Italian face wrinkled all over as he whipped off his cap and bowed to her. The girl smiled and slipped back into the kitchen.

'. . . all for the sake of my silver nutmeg tree' Martin hummed, peering down through the area railings into the kitchen where they were sitting. They looked very snug, with teapots and bread and butter on the kitchen table. His stick swung from side to side like the tail of a cheerful dog. Everybody seemed light-hearted and irresponsible, sallying out of their houses, flaunting along the streets with pennies for the organ-grinders and pennies for the beggars. Everybody seemed to have money to spend. Women clustered round the plate-glass windows. He too stopped, looked at the model of a toy boat; at dressing-cases, shining yellow with rows of silver bottles. But who wrote that song, he wondered, as he strolled on, about the King of Spain's daughter, the song that Pippy used to sing him, as she wiped his ears with a piece of slimy flannel? She used to take him on her knee and croak out in her wheezy rattle of a voice, 'The King of Spain's daughter came to visit me, all for the sake of. . . .' And then suddenly her knee gave, and down he was tumbled on to the floor.

Here he was at Hyde Park Corner. The scene was extremely animated. Vans, motor-cars, motor omnibuses were streaming down the hill. The trees in the Park had little green leaves on them. Cars with gay ladies in pale dresses were already passing in at the gates. Everybody was going about their business. And somebody, he observed, had written the words 'God is Love' in pink chalk on the gates of Apsley House. That must need some pluck, he thought, to write 'God is love' on the gates of Apsley House when at any moment a policeman might nab you. But here came his bus; and he climbed on top.

'To St Paul's,' he said, handing the conductor his coppers.

The omnibuses swirled and circled in a perpetual current

round the steps of St Paul's. The statue of Queen Anne seem to preside over the chaos and to supply it with a centre, like hub of a wheel. It seemed as if the white lady ruled the tra with her sceptre; directed the activities of the little men bowler hats and round coats; of the women carrying attac cases; of the vans, the lorries and the motor omnibuses. No and then single figures broke off from the rest and went up t steps into the church. The doors of the Cathedral kept openi and shutting. Now and again a blast of faint organ music w blown out into the air. The pigeons waddled; the sparrows flu tered. Soon after midday a little old man carrying a paper b took up his station half-way up the steps and proceeded to fe the birds. He held out a slice of bread. His lips moved. H seemed to be wheedling and coaxing them. Soon he was halo by a circle of fluttering wings. Sparrows perched on his he and his hands. Pigeons waddled close to his feet. A little crow gathered to watch him feeding the sparrows. He tossed his brea round him in a circle. Then there was a ripple in the air. Th great clock, all the clocks of the city, seemed to be gatheri their forces together; they seemed to be whirring a prelimina warning. Then the stroke struck. 'One' blared out. All the spa rows fluttered up into the air; even the pigeons were frightene some of them made a little flight round the head of Queen Ann

As the last ripple of the stroke died away, Martin came out the open space in front of the Cathedral.

He crossed over and stood with his back against a sho window looking up at the great dome. All the weights in h body seemed to shift. He had a curious sense of somethin moving in his body in harmony with the building; it righte itself: it came to a full stop. It was exciting – this change proportion. He wished he had been an architect. He stood wit his back pressed against the shop trying to get the whole of th cathedral clear. But it was difficult with so many people passin They knocked against him and brushed in front of him. It wa the rush hour, of course, when City men were making for the luncheons. They were taking short cuts across the steps. Th pigeons were swirling up and then settling down again. Th doors were opening and shutting as he mounted the steps. Th pigeons were a nuisance, he thought, making a mess on th steps. He climbed up slowly.

'And who's that?' he thought, looking at someone who was standing against one of the pillars. 'Don't I know her?'

Her lips were moving. She was talking to herself.

'It's Sally!' he thought. He hesitated; should he speak to her, or should he not? But she was company; and he was tired of his own.

'A penny for your thoughts, Sal!' he said, tapping her on the shoulder.

She turned; her expression changed instantly. 'Just as I was thinking of you, Martin!' she exclaimed.

'What a lie!' he said, shaking hands.

'When I think of people, I always see them,' she said. She gave her queer little shuffle as if she were a bird, a somewhat dishevelled fowl, for her cloak was not in the fashion. They stood for a moment on the steps, looking down at the crowded street beneath. A gust of organ music came out from the Cathedral behind them as the doors opened and shut. The faint ecclesiastical murmur was vaguely impressive, and the dark space of the Cathedral seen through the door.

'What were you thinking . . .?' he began. But he broke off. 'Come and lunch,' he said. 'I'll take you to a City chop-house,' and he shepherded her down the steps, along a narrow alley, blocked by carts, into which packages were being shot from the warehouses. They pushed through the swing doors into the chop-house.

'Very full today, Alfred,' said Martin affably, as the waiter took his coat and hat and hung them on the rack. He knew the waiter; he often lunched there; the waiter knew him too.

'Very full, Captain,' he said.

'Now,' he said, sitting down, 'what shall we have?'

A vast brownish-yellow joint was being trundled from table to table on a lorry.

'That,' said Sara, waving her hand at it.

'And drink?' said Martin. He took the wine-list and consulted it.

'Drink—' said Sara, 'drink, I leave to you.' She took off her gloves and laid them on a small reddish-brown book that was obviously a prayer-book.

'Drink you leave to me,' said Martin. Why, he wondered, do prayer-books always have their leaves gilt with red and gold? He chose the wine.

'And what were you doing,' he said, dismissing the waiter, St Paul's?'

'Listening to the service,' she said. She looked round her. T room was very hot and crowded. The walls were covered w gold leaves encrusted on a brown surface. People were pass them and coming in and out all the time. The waiter brou the wine. Martin poured her out a glass.

'I didn't know you went to services,' he said, looking at h prayer-book.

She did not answer. She kept looking round her, watching t people come in and go out. She sipped her wine. The colour w coming into her cheeks. She took up her knife and fork a began to eat the admirable mutton. They ate in silence for moment.

He wanted to make her talk.

'And what, Sal,' he said, touching the little book, 'd'you ma of it?'

She opened the prayer-book at random and began to read:

'The father incomprehensible; the son incomprehensible- she spoke in her ordinary voice.

'Hush!' he stopped her. 'Somebody's listening.'

In deference to him she assumed the manner of a lady lunc ing with a gentleman in a City restaurant.

'And what were you doing,' she asked, 'at St Paul's?'

'Wishing I'd been an architect,' he said. 'But they sent me in the Army instead, which I loathed.' He spoke emphatically.

'Hush,' she whispered. 'Somebody's listening.'

He looked round quickly; then he laughed. The wait was setting their tart in front of them. They ate in silence. H filled her glass again. Her cheeks were flushed; her eyes we bright. He envied her the generalized sensation of univers wellbeing that he used to get from a glass of wine. Wi was good – it broke down barriers. He wanted to make he talk.

'I didn't know you went to services,' he said, looking at he prayer-book. 'And what do you think of it?' She looked at it too Then she tapped it with her fork.

'What do *they* think of it, Martin?' she asked. 'The woma praying and the man with a long white beard?'

'Much what Crosby thinks when she comes to see me,' h said. He thought of the old woman standing at the door of hi

room with the pyjama jacket over her arm, and the devout look on her face.

'I'm Crosby's God,' he said, helping her to brussels sprouts.

'Crosby's God! Almighty, all-powerful Mr Martin!' She laughed.

She raised her glass to him. Was she laughing at him? he wondered. He hoped she did not think him very old. 'You remember Crosby, don't you?' he said. 'She's retired, and her dog's dead.'

'Retired and her dog's dead?' she repeated. She looked again over her shoulder. Conversation in a restaurant was impossible; it was broken into little fragments. City men in their neat striped suits and bowler hats were brushing past them all the time.

'It's a fine church,' she said, turning round. She had hopped back to St Paul's, he supposed.

'Magnificent,' he replied. 'Were you looking at the monuments?'

Somebody had come in whom he recognized: Erridge, the stockbroker. He raised a finger and beckoned. Martin rose and went to speak to him. When he came back she had filled her glass again. She was sitting there, looking at the people, as if she were a child that he had taken to a pantomime.

'And what are you doing this afternoon?' he asked.

'The Round Pond at four,' she said. She drummed on the table 'The Round Pond at four.' Now she had passed, he guessed, into the drowsy benevolence which waits on a good dinner and a glass of wine.

'Meeting somebody?' he asked.

'Yes. Maggie,' she said.

They ate in silence. Fragments of other people's talk reached them in broken sentences. Then the man to whom Martin had spoken touched him on the shoulder as he went out.

'Wednesday at eight,' he said.

'Right you are,' said Martin. He made a note in his pocket-book.

'And what are you doing this afternoon?' she asked.

'Ought to see my sister in prison,' he said, lighting a cigarette.

'In prison?' she asked.

'Rose. For throwing a brick,' he said.

'Red Rose, tawny Rose,' she began reaching out her hand for the wine again, 'wild Rose, thorny Rose—'

'No,' he said, putting his hand over the mouth of the bot 'you've had enough.' A little excited her. He must damp l excitement. There were people listening.

'A damned unpleasant thing,' he said, 'being in prison.'

She drew back her glass and sat gazing at it, as if the engine the brain were suddenly cut off. She was very like her mothe except when she laughed.

He would have liked to talk to her about her mother. But was impossible to talk. Too many people were listening, a they were smoking. Smoke mixed with the smell of meat ma the air heavy. He was thinking of the past when she exclaimec

'Sitting on a three-legged stool having meat crammed dov her throat!'

He roused himself. She was thinking of Rose, was she?

'Crash came a brick!' she laughed, flourishing her fork.

' "Roll up the map of Europe," said the man to the flunkey. don't believe in force"!' She brought down her fork. A plun stone jumped. Martin looked round. People were listening. H got up.

'Shall we go?' he said, '—if you've had enough?'

She got up and looked for her cloak.

'Well, I've enjoyed it,' she said, taking her cloak. 'Thank Martin, for my good lunch.'

He beckoned to the waiter who came with alacrity and totte up the bill. Martin laid a sovereign on the plate. Sara began t thrust her arms into the sleeves of her cloak.

'Shall I come with you,' he said, helping her, 'to the Roun Pond at four?'

'Yes!' she said, spinning round on her heel. 'To the Roun Pond at four!'

She walked off, a little unsteadily he observed, past the Cit men who were still eating.

Here the waiter came up with the change and Martin bega to slip it in his pocket. He kept back one coin for the tip. But a he was about to give it, he was struck by something shifty i Alfred's expression. He flicked up the flap of the bill; a tw shilling piece lay beneath. It was the usual trick. He lost h temper.

'What's this?' he said angrily.

'Didn't know it was there, sir,' the waiter stammered.

Martin felt his blood rise to his ears. He felt exactly like hi

father in a rage; as if he had white spots above his temples. He pocketed the coin that he had been going to give the waiter; and marched past him, brushing aside his hand. The man slunk back with a murmur.

'Let's be off,' he said, hustling Sara along the crowded room. 'Let's get out of this.'

He hurried her into the street. The fug, the warm meaty smell of the City chop-house, had suddenly become intolerable.

'How I hate being cheated!' he said as he put on his hat.

'Sorry, Sara,' he apologized. 'I oughtn't to have taken you there. It's a beastly hole.'

He drew in a breath of fresh air. The street noises, the unconcerned, business-like look of things, were refreshing after the hot steamy room. There were the carts waiting, drawn up along the street; and the packages sliding down into them from the warehouses. Again they came out in front of St Paul's. He looked up. There was the same old man still feeding the sparrows. And there was the Cathedral. He wished he could feel again the sense of weights changing in his body and coming to a stop; but the queer thrill of some correspondence between his own body and the stone no longer came to him. He felt nothing except anger. Also, Sara distracted him. She was about to cross the crowded road. He put out his hand to stop her. 'Take care,' he said. Then they crossed.

'Shall we walk?' he asked. She nodded. They began to walk along Fleet Street. Conversation was impossible. The pavement was so narrow that he had to step on and off in order to keep beside her. He still felt the discomfort of anger, but the anger itself was cooling. What ought I to have done? he thought, seeing himself brush past the waiter without giving him a tip. Not that; he thought, no, not that. People pressing against him made him step off the pavement. After all, the poor devil had to make a living. He liked being generous: he liked to leave people smiling; and two shillings meant nothing to him. But what's the use, he thought, now it's done? He began to hum his little song – and then stopped, remembering that he was with someone.

'Look at that, Sal,' he said, clutching at her arm. 'Look at that!'

He pointed at the splayed-out figure at Temple Bar; it looked as ridiculous as usual – something between a serpent and a fowl.

'Look at that!' he repeated laughing. They paused for a

moment to look at the little flattened figures lodged so u
comfortably against the pediment of Temple Bar: Queen V
toria: King Edward. Then they walked on. It was impossil
to talk because of the crowd. Men in wigs and gow
hurried across the street: some carried red bags, others bl
bags.

'The Law Courts,' he said, pointing at the cold mass of dec
ated stone. It looked very gloomy and funereal, '... whe
Morris spends his time,' he said aloud.

He still felt uncomfortable at having lost his temper. But t
feeling was passing. Only a little ridge of roughness remained i
his mind.

'D'you think I ought to have been ...' he began, a barrister l
meant; but also Ought I to have done that – lost his temper wi
the waiter.

'Ought to have been – ought to have done?' she asked, bendi
towards him. She had not caught his meaning in the roar of t
traffic. It was impossible to talk; but at any rate the feeling th
he had lost his temper was diminishing. That little sting w
being successfully smoothed over. Then back it came becau
he saw a beggar selling violets. And that poor devil, he though
had to go without his tip because he cheated me.... He fixed h
eyes on a pillar-box. Then he looked at a car. It was odd ho
soon one got used to cars without horses, he thought. They use
to look ridiculous. They passed the woman selling violets. Sh
wore a hat over her face. He dropped a sixpence in her tray t
make amends to the waiter. He shook his head. No violets, h
meant; and indeed they were faded. But he caught sight of he
face. She had no nose; her face was seamed with white patche
there were red rims for nostrils. She had no nose – she ha
pulled her hat down to hide that fact.

'Let's cross,' he said, abruptly. He took Sara's arm and mad
her cross between the omnibuses. She must have seen suc
sights often; he had, often; but not together – that made
difference. He hurried her on to the further pavement.

'We'll get a bus,' he said, 'Come along.'

He took her by the elbow to make her step out briskly. But i
was impossible; a cart blocked the way; there were people pass
ing. They were approaching Charing Cross. It was like the pier
of a bridge; men and women were sucked in instead of wate
They had to stop. Newspaper boys held placards against thei

legs. Men were buying papers: some loitered; others snatched them. Martin bought one and held it in his hand.

'We'll wait here,' he said. 'The bus'll come.' An old straw hat with a purple ribbon round it, he thought opening his paper. The sight persisted. He looked up. The station clock's always fast, he assured a man who was hurrying to catch a train. Always fast, he said to himself as he opened the paper. But there was no clock. He turned to read the news from Ireland. Omnibus after omnibus stopped, then swooped off again. It was difficult to concentrate on the news from Ireland; he looked up.

'This is ours,' he said, as the right bus came. They climbed on top and sat side by side overlooking the driver.

'Two to Hyde Park Corner,' he said, producing a handful of silver, and looked through the pages of the evening paper; but it was only an early edition.

'Nothing in it,' he said, stuffing the paper under the seat. 'And now—' he began, filling his pipe. They were running smoothly down the incline of Piccadilly. '—where my old father used to sit,' he broke off, waving his pipe at Club windows. '. . . and now' – he lit a match, '—and now, Sally, you can say whatever you like. Nobody's listening. Say something,' he added, throwing his match overboard, 'very profound.'

He turned to her. He wanted her to speak. Down they dipped; up they swooped again. He wanted her to speak; or he must speak himself. And what could he say? He had buried his feeling. But some emotion remained. He wanted her to speak it: but she was silent. No, he thought, biting the stem of his pipe. I won't say it. If I did she'd think me . . .

He looked at her. The sun was blazing on the windows of St George's Hospital. She was looking at it with rapture. But why with rapture? he wondered, as the bus stopped and he got down.

The scene since the morning had changed slightly. Clocks in the distance were just striking three. There were more cars; more women in pale summer dresses; more men in tail-coats and grey top-hats. The procession through the gates into the park was beginning. Everyone looked festive. Even the little dressmakers' apprentices with band-boxes looked as if they were taking part in some ceremonial. Green chairs were drawn up at the edge of the Row. They were full of people looking about them as if they had taken seats at a play. Riders cantered

to the end of the Row; pulled up their horses; turned and c tered the other way. The wind, coming from the west, mov white clouds grained with gold across the sky. The windows Park Lane shone with blue and gold reflections.

Martin stepped out briskly.

'Come along,' he said; 'come – come!' He walked on. I young, he thought; I'm in the prime of life. There was a tang earth in the air; even in the Park there was some faint smell spring, of the country.

'How I like—' He said aloud. He looked round. He had spok to the empty air. Sara had lagged behind; there she was, tyi her shoe-lace. But he felt as if he had missed a step going dow stairs.

'What a fool one feels when one talks aloud to oneself,' h said as she came up. She pointed.

'But look,' she said, 'they all do it.'

A middle-aged woman was coming towards them. She wa talking to herself. Her lips moved; she was gesticulating wit her hand.

'It's the spring,' he said, as she passed them.

'No. Once in winter I came here,' she said, 'and there was Negro, laughing aloud in the snow.'

'In the snow,' said Martin. 'A Negro.' The sun was bright o the grass; they were passing a bed in which the many-coloure hyacinths were curled and glossy.

'Don't let's think of the snow,' he said. 'Let's think—' A youn woman was wheeling a perambulator; a sudden thought cam into his head. 'Maggie,' he said. 'Tell me. I haven't seen her sinc her baby was born. And I've never met the Frenchman – wha d'you call him? – René?'

'Renny,' she said. She was still under the influence of th wine; of the wandering airs; of the people passing. He too fe the same distraction; but he wanted to end it.

'Yes. What's he like, this man René; Renny?'

He pronounced the word first in the French way; then as sh did, in the English. He wanted to wake her. He took her arm.

'Renny!' Sara repeated. She threw her head back and laughe 'Let me see,' she said. 'He wears a red tie with white spots. An has dark eyes. And he takes an orange – suppose we're at dinne and says, looking straight at you, "This orange, Sara—" ' Sh rolled her *r*'s. She paused.

'There's another person talking to himself,' she broke off. A young man came past them in a closely buttoned-up coat as if he had no shirt. He was muttering as he walked. He scowled at them as he passed them.

'But Renny?' said Martin.

'We were talking about Renny,' he reminded her. 'He takes an orange—'

'... and pours himself out a glass of wine,' she resumed. ' "Science is the religion of the future!" ' she exclaimed, waving her hand as if she held a glass of wine.

'Of wine?' said Martin. Half listening, he had visualized, an earnest French professor – a little picture to which now he must add inappropriately a glass of wine.

'Yes, wine,' she repeated. 'His father was a merchant,' she continued. 'A man with a black beard; a merchant at Bordeaux. And one day,' she continued, 'when he was a little boy, playing in the garden, there was a tap on the window. "Don't make so much noise. Play further away," said a woman in a white cap. His mother was dead. ... And he was afraid to tell his father that the horse was too big to ride ... and they sent him to England. ...'

She was skipping over railings.

'And then what happened?' said Martin, joining her. 'They became engaged?'

She was silent. He waited for her to explain – why they had married – Maggie and Renny. He waited, but she said no more. Well, she married him and they're happy he thought. He was jealous for a moment. The Park was full of couples walking together. Everything seemed fresh and full of sweetness. The air puffed soft in their faces. It was laden with murmurs; with the stir of branches; the rush of wheels; dogs barking, and now and again the intermittent song of a thrush.

Here a lady passed them, talking to herself. As they looked at her she turned and whistled, as if to her dog. But the dog she had whistled was another person's dog. It bounded off in the opposite direction. The lady hurried on pursing her lips together.

'People don't like being looked at,' said Sara, 'when they're talking to themselves.' Martin roused himself.

'Look here,' he said. 'We've gone the wrong way.' Voices floated out to them.

They had been walking in the wrong direction. They w near the bald rubbed space where the speakers congrega Meetings were in full swing. Groups had gathered round different orators. Mounted on their platforms, or sometim only on boxes, the speakers were holding forth. The voi became louder, louder and louder as they approached.

'Let's listen,' said Martin. A thin man was leaning forwa holding a slate in his hand. They could hear him say, 'Ladies a gentlemen . . .' They stopped in front of him. 'Fix your eyes me,' he said. They fixed their eyes on him. 'Don't be afraid,' said, crooking his finger. He had an ingratiating manner. turned his slate over. 'Do I look like a Jew?' he asked. Then turned his slate and looked on the other side. And they hea him say that his mother was born in Bermondsey, as the strolled on, and his father in the Isle of— The voice died away.

'What about this chap?' said Martin. Here was a large ma banging on the rail of his platform.

'Fellow citizens!' he was shouting. They stopped. The crow of loafers, errand-boys and nursemaids gaped up at him wit their mouths falling open and their eyes gazing blankly. H hand raked in the line of cars that was passing with a supe gesture of scorn. His shirt appeared under his wasitcoat.

'Joostice and liberty,' said Martin, repeating his words, as th fist thumped on the railing. They waited. Then it all came ov again.

'But he's a jolly good speaker,' said Martin, turning. The voi died away. 'And now, what's the old lady saying?' They strolle on.

The old lady's audience was extremely small. Her voice wa hardly audible. She held a little book in her hand and she wa saying something about sparrows. But her voice tapered off int a thin frail pipe. A chorus of little boys imitated her.

They listened for a moment. Then Martin turned agai 'Come along, Sal,' he said, putting his hand on her shoulder.

The voices grew fainter, fainter and fainter. Soon they cease altogether. They strolled on across the smooth slope that ros and fell like a breadth of green cloth striped with straigh brown paths in front of them. Great white dogs were gam bolling; through the trees shone the waters of the Serpentin set here and there with little boats. The urbanity of the Par the gleam of the water, the sweep and curve and composition

the scene, as if somebody had designed it, affected Martin agreeably.

'Joostice and liberty,' he said half to himself, as they came to the water's edge and stood a moment, watching the gulls cut the air into sharp white patterns with their wings.

'Did you agree with him?' he asked, taking Sara's arm to rouse her; for her lips were moving; she was talking to herself. 'That fat man,' he explained, 'who flung his arm out.' She started.

'Oi, oi, oi!' she exclaimed, imitating his cockney accent.

Yes, thought Martin, as they walked on. Oi, oi, oi, oi, oi, oi. It's always that. There wouldn't be much justice or liberty for the likes of him if the fat man had his way – or beauty either.

'And the poor old lady whom nobody listened to?' he said, 'talking about the sparrows. . . .'

He could still see in his mind's eye the thin man persuasively crooking his finger; the fat man who flung his arms so that his braces showed; and the little old lady who tried to make her voice heard above the cat-calls and whistles. There was a mixture of comedy and tragedy in the scene.

But they had reached the gate into Kensington Gardens. A long row of cars and carriages was drawn up by the kerb. Striped umbrellas were open over the little round tables where people were already sitting, waiting for their tea. Waitresses were hurrying in and out with trays; the season had begun. The scene was very gay.

A lady, fashionably dressed with a purple feather dipping down on one side of her hat, sat there sipping an ice. The sun dappled the table and gave her a curious look of transparency, as if she were caught in a net of light; as if she were composed of lozenges of floating colours. Martin half thought that he knew her; he half raised his hat. But she sat there looking in front of her; sipping her ice. No, he thought; he did not know her, and he stopped for a moment to light his pipe. What would the world be, he said to himself – he was still thinking of the fat man brandishing his arm – without 'I' in it? He lit the match. He looked at the flame that had become almost invisible in the sun. He stood for a second drawing at his pipe. Sara had walked on. She too was netted with floating lights from between the leaves. A primal innocence seemed to brood over the scene. The birds made a fitful sweet chirping in the branches; the roar of London encircled the open space in the ring of distant but complete

sound. The pink and white blossoms rode up and down as the branches moved in the breeze. The sun dappling the leaves gave everything a curious look of insubstantiality as if it were broken into seperate points of light. He too, himself, seemed dispersed. His mind for a moment was a blank. Then he roused himself, threw away his match, and caught up Sally.

'Come along!' he said. 'Come along. . . . The Round Pond at four!'

They walked on arm in arm in silence, down the long avenue with the Palace and the phantom church at the end of its vista. The size of the human figure seemed to have shrunk. Instead of full-grown people, children were now in the majority. Dogs of all sorts abounded. The air was full of barking and sudden shrill cries. Coveys of nursemaids pushed perambulators along the paths. Babies lay fast asleep in them like images of faintly tinted wax; their perfectly smooth eyelids fitted over their eyes as if they sealed completely. He looked down; he liked children. Sally had looked like that the first time he saw her, asleep in her perambulator in the hall in Browne Street.

He stopped short. They had reached the Pond.

'Where's Maggie?' he said. 'There – is that her?' He pointed to a young woman who was lifting a baby out of its perambulator under a tree.

'Where?' said Sara. She looked in the wrong direction.

He pointed.

'There, under that tree.'

'Yes,' she said, 'that's Maggie.'

They walked in that direction.

'But is it?' said Martin. He was suddenly doubtful; for she had the unconsciousness of a person who is unaware that she is being looked at. It made her unfamiliar. With one hand she held the child; with the other she arranged the pillows of the perambulator. She too was dappled with lozenges of floating light.

'Yes,' he said, noticing something about her gesture, 'that's Maggie.'

She turned and saw them.

She held up her hand as if to warn them to approach quietly. She put a finger to her lips. They approached silently. As they reached her, the distant sound of a clock striking was wafted on the breeze. One, two, three, four it struck. . . . Then it ceased.

'We met at St Paul's,' said Martin in a whisper. He dragged up wo chairs and sat down. They were silent for a moment. The hild was not asleep. Then Maggie bent over and looked at the hild.

'You needn't talk in a whisper,' she said aloud. 'He's asleep.'

'We met at St. Paul's,' Martin repeated in his ordinary voice. 'd been seeing my stockbroker.' He took off his hat and laid it n the grass. 'And when I came out,' he resumed, 'there was ally. . . .' He looked at her. She had never told him, he rememered, what it was that she was thinking, as she stood there, vith her lips moving, on the steps of St Paul's.

Now she was yawning. Instead of taking the little hard green hair which he had pulled up for her, she had thrown herself own on the grass. She had folded herself like a grasshopper vith her back against the tree. The prayer-book, with its red and old leaves, was lying on the ground tented over with trembling lades of grass. She yawned; she stretched. She was already half sleep.

He drew his chair beside Maggie's; and looked at the scene in ront of them.

It was admirably composed. There was the white figure of Queen Victoria against a green bank; beyond, was the red brick f the old palace; the phantom Church raised its spire, and the Round Pond made a pool of blue. A race of yachts was going orward. The boats leant on their sides so that the sails touched he water. There was a nice little breeze.

'And what did you talk about?' said Maggie.

Martin could not remember. 'She was tipsy,' he said, pointing o Sara. 'And now she's going to sleep.' He felt sleepy himself. The un for the first time was almost hot on his head.

Then he answered her question.

'The whole world,' he said, 'Politics; religion; morality.' He yawned. Gulls were screaming as they rose and sank over a lady vho was feeding them. Maggie was watching them. He looked t her.

'I haven't seen you,' he said, 'since your baby was born.' t's changed her, having a child, he thought. It's improved er, he thought. But she was watching the gulls; the lady had hrown a handful of fish. The gulls swooped round and round er head.

'D'you like having a child?' he said.

'Yes,' she said, rousing herself to answer him. 'It's a though.'

'But it's nice having ties, isn't it?' he enquired. He was fon children. He looked at the sleeping baby with its eyes sealed its thumb in its mouth.

'D'you want them?' she asked.

'Just what I was asking myself,' he said, 'before—'

Here Sara made a click at the back of her throat; he drop his voice to a whisper. 'Before I met her at St Paul's,' he s They were silent. The baby was asleep; Sara was asleep; presence of the two sleepers seemed to enclose them in a ci of privacy. Two of the racing yachts were coming together a they must collide; but one passed just ahead of the otl Martin watched them. Life had resumed its ordinary p portions. Everything once more was back in its place. The bo were sailing; the men walking; the little boys dabbled in pond for minnows; the waters of the pond rippled bright bl Everything was full of the stir, the potency, the fecundity spring.

Suddenly he said aloud:

'Possessiveness is the devil.'

Maggie looked at him. Did he mean herself – herself and baby? No. There was a tone in his voice that told her he v thinking not of her.

'What are you thinking?' she asked.

'About the woman I'm in love with,' he said. 'Love ought stop on both sides, don't you think, simultaneously?' He spo without any stress on the words, so as not to wake the sleepe 'But it won't – that's the devil,' he added in the same und tone.

'Bored, are you?' she murmured.

'Stiff,' he said. 'Bored stiff.' He stooped and disinterred pebble in the grass.

'And jealous?' she murmured. Her voice was very low a soft.

'Horribly,' he whispered. It was true, now that she referred it. Here the baby half woke and stretched out its hand. Mag rocked the perambulator. Sara stirred. Their privacy was i perilled. It would be destroyed at any moment, he felt; and wanted to talk.

He glanced at the sleepers. The baby's eyes were shut, a

ara's too. Still they seemed encircled in a ring of solitude. peaking in a low voice without accent, he told her his story; he story of the lady; how she wanted to keep him, and he vanted to be free. It was an ordinary story, but painful – mixed. As he told it, however, the sting was drawn. They sat silent, ooking in front of them.

Another race was starting; men crouched at the edge of the ond, each with his stick resting on a toy boat. It was a charmng scene, gay, innocent and a trifle ridiculous. The signal was iven; off the boats went. And will he, Martin thought, looking t the sleeping baby, go through the same thing too? He was hinking of himself – of his jealousy.

'My father,' he said suddenly, but softly, 'had a lady. . . . She alled him "Bogy".' And he told her the story of the lady who ept a boarding house at Putney – the very respectable lady, rown stout, who wanted help with her roof. Maggie laughed, ut very gently, so as not to wake the sleepers. Both were still leeping soundly.

'Was he in love,' Martin asked her, 'with your mother?'

She was looking at the gulls, cutting patterns on the blue disance with their wings. His question seemed to sink through vhat she was seeing; then suddenly it reached her.

'Are we brother and sister?' she asked; and laughed out loud. The child opened its eyes, and uncurled its fingers.

'We've woken him,' said Martin. He began to cry. Maggie had o soothe him. Their privacy was over. The child cried; and the locks began striking. The sound came wafted gently towards hem on the breeze. One, two, three, four, five. . . .

'It's time to go,' said Maggie, as the last stroke died away. She aid the baby back on its pillow, and turned. Sara was still sleep. She lay crumpled up with her back to the tree. Martin tooped and threw a twig at her. She opened her eyes but shut hem again.

'No, no,' she protested, stretching her arms over her head.

'It's time,' said Maggie. She pulled herself up. 'Time is it?' she ighed. 'How strange . . .!' she murmured. She sat up and rubbed ier eyes.

'Martin!' she exclaimed. She looked at him as he stood over ier in his blue suit holding his stick in his hand. She looked at im as if she were bringing him back to the field of vision.

'Martin!' she said again.

'Yes, Martin!' he replied. 'Did you hear what we've b
saying?' he asked her.

'Voices,' she yawned, shaking her head. 'Only voices.'

He paused for a moment, looking down at her. 'Well, I'm
he said, taking up his hat, 'to dine with a cousin in Grosve
Square,' he added. He turned and left them.

He looked back at them after he had gone a little dista
They were still sitting by the perambulator under the trees.
walked on. Then he looked back again. The ground sloped, a
the trees were hidden. A very stout lady was being tugged alo
the path by a small dog on a chain. He could see them no long

The sun was setting as he drove across the Park, an hour
two later. He was thinking that he had forgotten something; b
what, he did not know. Scene passed over scene; one oblitera
another. Now he was crossing the bridge over the Serpenti
The water glowed with sunset light; twisted poles of lamp lig
lay on the water, and there, at the end the white bridge co
posed the scene. The cab entered the shadow of the trees, a
joined the long line of cabs that was streaming towards t
Marble Arch. People in evening dress were going to plays a
parties. The light became yellower and yellower. The road w
beaten to a metallic silver. Everything looked festive.

But I'm going to be late, he thought, for the cab was held
in a block by the Marble Arch. He looked at his watch – it w
just on eight-thirty. But eight-thirty means eight-forty-five
thought, as the cab moved on. Indeed as it turned into t
square there was a car at the door, and a man getting out. So I
just on time, he thought, and paid the driver.

The door opened almost before he touched the bell, as if
had trod on a spring. The door opened, and two footmen start
forward to take his things directly he entered the black-an
white paved hall. He followed another man up the imposi
staircase of white marble, sweeping in a curve. A succession
large, dark pictures hung on the wall, and at the top outside t
door was a yellow-and-blue picture of Venetian palaces and pa
green canals.

'Canaletto or the school of?' he thought, pausing to let t
other man precede him. Then he gave his name to the footma

'Captain Pargiter,' the man boomed out; and there was Kit

tanding at the door. She was formal; fashionable; with a dash
f red on her lips. She gave him her hand; but he moved on for
ther guests were arriving. 'A saloon?' he said to himself, for the
oom with its chandeliers, yellow panels, and sofas and chairs
otted about had the air of a grandiose waiting-room. Seven or
ight people were already there. It's not going to work this time,
e said to himself as he chatted with his host, who had been
acing. His face shone as if it had only that moment been
aken out of the sun. One almost expected, Martin thought, as
e stood talking, to see a pair of glasses slung round his shoul-
lers, just as there was a red mark across his forehead where his
at had been. No, it's not going to work, Martin thought as they
alked about horses. He heard a paper boy calling in the street
elow, and the hooting of horns. He preserved clearly his sense
f the identity of different objects, and their differences. When
party worked all things, all sounds merged into one. He looked
t an old lady with a wedge-shaped stone-coloured face sitting
nsconced on a sofa. He glanced at Kitty's portrait by a fashion-
ble portrait painter as he chatted, standing first on this foot,
hen on that, to the grizzled man with the bloodhound eyes
nd the urbane manner whom Kitty had married instead of
dward. Then she came up and introduced him to a girl all in
vhite who was standing alone with her hand on the back of a
hair.

'Miss Ann Hillier,' she said. 'My cousin, Captain Pargiter.'

She stood for a moment beside them as if to faciliate their
ntroduction. But she was a little stiff always; she did nothing
ut flick her fan up and down.

'Been to the races, Kitty?' Martin said, because he knew that
he hated racing, and he always felt a wish to tease her.

'I? No; I don't go to races,' she replied rather shortly. She
urned away because somebody else had come in – a man in
old lace, with a star.

I should have been better off, Martin thought, reading my
ook.

'Have you been to the races?' he said aloud to the girl whom
e was to take down to dinner. She shook her head. She had
vhite arms; a white dress; and a pearl necklace. Purely virginal,
e said to himself; and only an hour ago I was lying stark naked
n my bath in Ebury Street, he thought.

'I've been watching polo,' she said. He looked down at his

shoes, and noticed that they had creases across them; they w
old; he had meant to buy a new pair, but had forgotten. T
was what he had forgotten, he thought, seeing himself again
the cab, crossing the bridge over the Serpentine.

But they were going down to dinner. He gave her his arm.
they went down the stairs, and he watched the ladies' dresses
front of them trail from step to step, he thought, What on ea
am I going to say to her? Then they crossed the black-and-wh
squares and went into the dining-room. It was harmonious
shrouded; pictures with hooded bars of light under them sho
out; and the dinner table glowed; but no light shone directly
their faces. If this doesn't work, he thought, looking at t
portrait of a nobleman with a crimson cloak and a star th
hung luminous in front of him, I'll never do it again. Then
braced himself to talk to the virginal girl who sat beside hi
But he had to reject almost everything that occurred to him
she was so young.

'I've thought of three subjects to talk about,' he began straig
off, without thinking how the sentence was to end. 'Racing; t
Russian ballet; and' – he hesitated for a moment – 'Irelan
Which interests you?' He unfolded his napkin.

'Please,' she said, bending slightly towards him, 'say th
again.'

He laughed. She had a charming way of putting her head
one side and bending towards him.

'Don't let's talk of any of them,' he said. 'Let's talk of som
thing interesting. Do you enjoy parties?' he asked her. She w
dipping her spoon in her soup. She looked up at him as she lift
it with eyes that seemed like bright stones under a film of wate
They're like drops of glass under water, he thought. She w
extraordinarily pretty.

'But I've only been to three parties in my life!' she said. S
gave a charming little laugh.

'You don't say so!' he exclaimed. 'This is the third, then; or
it the fourth?'

He listened to the sounds in the street. He could just hear t
cars hooting; but they had gone far away; they made a co
tinuous rushing noise. It was beginning to work. He held out h
glass. He would like her to say, he thought, as his glass w
filled, 'What a charming man I sat next!' when she went to be
that night.

'This is my third *real* party,' she said, stressing the word 'real' in a way that seemed to him slightly pathetic. She must have been in the nursery three months ago, he thought, eating bread and butter.

'And I was thinking as I shaved,' he said, 'that I would never go to a party again.' It was true; he had seen a hole in the bookcase. Who's taken my life of Wren? he had thought, holding his razor out; and had wanted to stay and read, alone. But now . . . what little piece of his vast experience could he break off and give to her, he wondered?

'Do you live in London?' she asked.

'Ebury Street,' he told her. And she knew Ebury Street, because it was on the way to Victoria; she often went to Victoria, because they had a house in Sussex.

'And now tell me,' he said, feeling that they had broken the ice – when she turned her head to answer some remark of the man on the other side. He was annoyed. The whole fabric that he had been building, like a game of spillikins in which one frail little bone is hooked on top of another, was dashed to the ground. Ann was talking as if she had known the other man all her life; he had hair that looked as if a rake had been drawn through it; he was very young. Martin sat silent. He looked at the great portrait opposite. A footman was standing beneath it; a row of decanters obscured the folds of the cloak on the floor. That's the third Earl, or the fourth? he asked himself. He knew his eighteenth century; it was the fourth Earl who had made the great marriage. But after all, he thought, looking at Kitty at the head of the table, the Rigbys are a better family than they are. He smiled; he checked himself. I only think of 'better families' when I dine in this sort of place, he thought. He looked at another picture; a lady in sea green; the famous Gainsborough. But here Lady Margaret, the woman on his left, turned to him.

'I'm sure you'll agree with me,' she said, 'Captain Pargiter' – he noticed that she swept her eyes over the name on his card before she spoke it, although they had met often before – 'that it's a devilish thing to have done?'

She spoke so pouncingly that the fork she held upright seemed like a weapon with which she was about to pinion him. He threw himself into their conversation. It was about politics of course, about Ireland. 'Tell me – what's your opinion?' she asked, with her fork poised. For a moment he had the illusion

that he too was behind the scenes. The screen was down; the lights were up; and he too was behind the scenes. It was an illusion of course; they were only throwing him scraps from their larder; but it was an agreeable sensation while it lasted. He listened. Now she was holding forth to a distinguished old man at the end of the table. He watched him. He had let down a mask of infinitely wise tolerance over his face as she harangued them. He was arranging three crusts of bread by the side of his plate as if he were playing a mysterious little game of profound significance. 'So,' he seemed to be saying, 'So,' as if they were fragments of human destiny, not crusts, that he held in his fingers. The mask might conceal anything – or nothing? Anyhow it was a mask of great distinction. But here Lady Margaret pinioned him too with her fork; and he raised his eyebrows and moved one of the crusts a little to one side before he spoke. Martin leant forward to listen.

'When I was in Ireland,' he began, 'in 1880 . . .' He spoke very simply; he was offering them a memory; he told his story perfectly; it held its meaning without spilling a single drop. And he had played a great part. Martin listened attentively. Yes, it was absorbing. Here we are, he thought, going on and on and on. . . . He leant forward trying to catch every word. But he was conscious of some interruption; Ann had turned to him.

'Do tell me' – she was asking him – 'who *he* is?' She bent her head to the right. She was under the impression that he knew everybody, apparently. He was flattered. He looked along the table. Who was it? Somebody he had met; somebody, he guessed, who was not quite at his ease.

'I know him,' he said. 'I know him—' He had a rather white, fat face; he was talking away at a great rate. And the young married woman to whom he was talking was saying 'I see; I see,' with little nods of her head. But there was a slight look of strain on her face. You needn't put yourself to all that trouble, my good fellow, Martin felt inclined to say to him. She doesn't understand a word you're saying.

'I can't put a name to him,' he said aloud. 'But I've met him – let me see – where? In Oxford or Cambridge?'

A faint look of amusement came into Ann's eyes. She had spotted the difference. She coupled them together. They were not her world – no.

'Have you seen the Russian dancers?' she was saying. She had

been there with her young man, it seemed. And what's your world, Martin thought, as she rapped out her slender stock of adjectives – 'heavenly', 'amazing', 'marvellous', and so on. Is it '*the*' world? he mused. He looked down the table. Anyhow no other world had a chance against it, he thought. And it's a good world too, he added; large; generous; hospitable. And very nice-looking. He glanced from face to face. Dinner was drawing to an end. They all looked as if they had been rubbed with wash leather, like precious stones; yet the bloom seemed ingrained; it went through the stone. And the stone was clear-cut; there was no blur, no indecision. Here a footman's white-gloved hand removing dishes knocked over a glass of wine. A red splash trickled on to the lady's dress. But she did not move a muscle; she went on talking. Then she straightened the clean napkin that had been brought her, nonchalantly, over the stain.

That's what I like, Martin thought. He admired that. She would have blown her fingers on her nose like an applewoman if she wanted to, he thought. But Ann was talking.

'And when he gives that leap!' she exclaimed – she raised her hand with a lovely gesture in the air – 'and then comes down!' She let her hand fall in her lap.

'Marvellous!' Martin agreed. He had got the very accent, he thought; he had got it from the young man whose hair looked as if a rake had gone through it.

'Yes: Nijinsky's marvellous,' he agreed. 'Marvellous,' he repeated.

'And my aunt has asked me to meet him at a party,' said Ann.

'Your aunt?' he said aloud.

She mentioned a well-known name.

'Oh, she's your aunt, is she?' he said. He placed her. So *that* was her world. He wanted to ask her – for he found her charming in her youth, her simplicity – but it was too late. Ann was rising.

'I hope—' he began. She bent her head towards him as if she longed to stay, catch his last word, his least word; but could not, since Lady Lasswade had risen; and it was time for her to go.

Lady Lasswade had risen; everybody rose. All the pink, grey, sea-coloured dresses lengthened themselves, and for a moment the tall women standing by the table looked like the famous Gainsborough hanging on the wall. The table, strewn with napkins and wine-glasses, had a derelict air as they left it.

For a moment the ladies clustered at the door; then the little ol woman in black hobbled past them with remarkable dignity and Kitty, coming last, put her arm round Ann's shoulder an led her out. The door shut on the ladies.

Kitty paused for a moment.

'I hope you liked my old cousin?' she said to Ann as they walked upstairs together. She put her hand to her dress anc straightened something as they passed a looking-glass.

'I thought him charming!' Ann exclaimed. 'And what a lovely tree!' She spoke of Martin and the tree in exactly the same tone. They paused for a moment to look at a tree that was covered with pink blossoms in a china tub standing at the door. Some of the flowers were fully out; others were still unopened. As they looked a petal dropped.

'It's cruel to keep it here,' said Kitty, 'in this hot air.'

They went in. While they dined the servants had opened the folding doors and lit lights in a further room so that it seemed as if they came into another room freshly made ready for them. There was a great fire blazing between two stately fire-dogs but it seemed cordial and decorative rather than hot. Two or three of the ladies stood before it, opening and shutting their fingers as they spread them to the blaze; but they turned to make room for their hostess.

'How I love that picture of you, Kitty!' said Mrs Aislabie, looking up at the portrait of Lady Lasswade as a young woman. Her hair had been very red in those days; she was toying with a basket of roses. Fiery but tender, she looked, emerging from a cloud of white muslin.

Kitty glanced at it and then turned away.

'One never likes one's own picture,' she said.

'But it's the image of you!' said another lady.

'Not now,' said Kitty, laughing off the compliment rather awkwardly. Always after dinner women paid each other compliments about their clothes or their looks, she thought. She did not like being alone with women after dinner; it made her shy. She stood there, upright among them, while footmen went round with trays of coffee.

'By the way, I hope the wine—' she paused and helped herself to coffee, 'the wine didn't stain your frock, Cynthia?' she said to the young married woman who had taken the disaster so coolly.

'And such a lovely frock,' said Lady Margaret, fondling the folds of golden satin between her finger and thumb.

'D'you like it?' said the young woman.

'It's perfectly lovely! I've been looking at it the whole evening!' said Mrs Treyer, an Oriental-looking woman, with a feather floating back from her head in harmony with her nose, which was Jewish.

Kitty looked at them admiring the lovely frock. Eleanor would have found herself out of it, she thought. She had refused her invitation to dinner. That annoyed her.

'Do tell me,' Lady Cynthia interrupted, 'who was the man I sat next? One always meets such interesting people at your house,' she added.

'The man you sat next?' said Kitty. She considered a moment. 'Tony Ashton,' she said.

'Is that the man who's been lecturing on French poetry at Mortimer House?' chimed in Mrs Aislabie. 'I longed to go to those lectures. I heard they were wonderfully interesting.'

'Mildred went,' said Mrs Treyer.

'Why should we all stand?' said Kitty. She made a movement with her hands towards the seats. She did things like that so abruptly that they called her, behind her back, 'The Grenadier'. They all moved this way and that, and she herself, after seeing how the couples sorted themselves, sat down by old Aunt Warburton, who was enthroned in the great chair.

'Tell me about my delightful godson,' the old lady began. She meant Kitty's second son, who was with the fleet at Malta.

'He's at Malta—' she began. She sat down on a low chair and began answering her questions. But the fire was too hot for Aunt Warburton. She raised her knobbed old hand.

'Priestley wants to roast us all alive,' said Kitty. She got up and went to the window. The ladies smiled as she strode across the room and jerked up the top of the long window. Just for a moment, as the curtains hung apart, she looked at the square outside. There was a spatter of leaf-shadow and lamplight on the pavement; the usual policeman was balancing himself as he patrolled; the usual little men and women, foreshortened from this height, hurried along by the railings. So she saw them hurrying, the other way, when she brushed her teeth in the morning. Then she came back and sat down on a low stool

beside old Aunt Warburton. The worldly old woman was honest, in her way.

'And the little red-haired ruffian whom I love?' she asked. He was her favourite; the little boy at Eton.

'He's been in trouble,' said Kitty. 'He's been swished.' She smiled. He was her favourite too.

The old lady grinned. She liked boys who got into trouble. She had a wedge-shaped yellow face with an occasional bristle on her chin; she was over eighty; but she sat as if she were riding a hunter, Kitty thought, glancing at her hands. They were coarse hands, with big finger-joints; red and white sparks flashed from her rings as she moved them.

'And you, my dear,' said the old lady, looking at her shrewdly under her bushy eyebrows, 'busy as usual?'

'Yes. Much as usual,' said Kitty, evading the shrewd old eyes; for she did things on the sly that they – the ladies over there – did not approve.

They were chattering together. Yet animated as it sounded, to Kitty's ear the talk lacked substance. It was a battledore and shuttlecock talk, to be kept going until the door opened and the gentlemen came in. Then it would stop. They were talking about a by-election. She could hear Lady Margaret telling some story that was rather coarse presumably, in the eighteenth-century way, since she dropped her voice.

'—turned her upside down and slapped her,' she could hear her say. There was a twitter of laughter.

'I'm so delighted he got in in spite of them,' said Mrs Treyer. They dropped their voices.

'I'm a tiresome old woman,' said Aunt Warburton, raising one of her knobbed hands to her shoulder. 'But now I'm going to ask you to shut that window.' The draught was getting at her rheumatic joint.

Kitty strode to the window. 'Damn these women!' she said to herself. She laid hold of the long stick with a beak at the end that stood in the window and poked; but the window stuck. She would have liked to fleece them of their clothes, of their jewels, of their intrigues, of their gossip. The window went up with a jerk. There was Ann standing about with nobody to talk to.

'Come and talk to us, Ann,' she said, beckoning to her. Ann drew up a footstool and sat down at Aunt Warburton's feet.

There was a pause. Old Aunt Warburton disliked young girls; but they had relatons in common.

'Where's Timmy, Ann?' she asked.

'Harrow,' said Ann.

'Ah, you've always been to Harrow,' said Aunt Warburton. And then the old lady, with the beautiful breeding that simulated at least human charity, flattered the girl, likening her to her grandmother, a famous beauty.

'How I should love to have known her!' Ann exclaimed. 'Do tell me – what was she like?'

The old lady began making a selection from her memoirs; it was only a selection; an edition with asterisks; for it was a story that could hardly be told to a girl in white satin. Kitty's mind wandered. If Charles stayed much longer downstairs, she thought, glancing at the clock, she would miss her train. Could Priestley be trusted to whisper a message in his ears? She would give them another ten minutes; she turned to Aunt Warburton again.

'She must have been wonderful!' Ann was saying. She sat with her hands clasped round her knees looking up into the face of the hairy old dowager. Kitty felt a moment's pity. Her face will be like their faces, she thought, looking at the little group at the other side of the room. Their faces looked harassed, worried; their hands moved restlessly. Yet they're brave, she thought; and generous. They gave as much as they took. Had Eleanor after all any right to despise them? Had she done more with her life than Margaret Marrable? And I? she thought. And I? ... Who's right? she thought. Who's wrong? ... Here mercifully the door opened.

The gentlemen came in. They came in reluctantly, rather slowly, as if they had just stopped talking, and had to get their bearings in the drawing-room. They were a little flushed and still laughing, as if they had stopped in the middle of what they were saying. They filed in; and the distinguished old man moved across the room with the air of a ship making port, and all the ladies stirred without rising. The game was over; the battledores and shuttlecocks put away. They were like gulls settling on fish, Kitty thought. There was a rising and a fluttering. The great man let himself slowly down into a chair beside his old friend Lady Warburton. He put the tips of his fingers together and began 'Well ...?' as if he were continuing a conversation left

unfinished the night before. Yes, she thought, the fire was som thing – was it human? civilized? she could not find the word sh wanted – about the old couple, talking, as they had talked fo the past fifty years. . . . They were all talking. They had a settled in to add another sentence to the story that was ju ending, or in the middle, or about to begin.

But there was Tony Ashton standing by himself without sentence to add to the story. She went up to him therefore.

'Have you seen Edward lately?' he asked her as usual.

'Yes, today,' she said. 'I lunched with him. We walked in th Park. . . .' She stopped. They had walked in the Park. A thrus had been singing; they had stopped to listen. 'That's the wis thrush that sings each song twice over . . .' he had said. 'Doe he?' she had asked innocently. And it had been a quotation.

She had felt foolish; Oxford always made her feel foolish. Sh disliked Oxford; yet she respected Edward and Tony too, sh thought looking at him. A snob on the surface; underneath scholar. . . . They had a standard. . . . But she roused herself.

He would like to talk to some smart woman – Mrs Aislabie, o Margaret Marrable. But they were both engaged – both wer adding sentences with considerable vivacity. There was a pause She was not a good hostess, she reflected; this sort of hitc always happened at her parties. There was Ann; Ann about t be captured by a youth she knew. But Kitty beckoned. Ann came instantly and submissively.

'Come and be introduced,' she said, 'to Mr Ashton. He's been lecturing at Mortimer House,' she explained, 'about—' She hesitated.

'Mallarmé,' he said with his odd little squeak, as if his voice had been pinched off.

Kitty turned away. Martin came up to her.

'A very brilliant party, Lady Lasswade,' he said with his usual tiresome irony.

'This? Oh, not at all,' she said brusquely. This wasn't a party Her parties were never brilliant. Martin was trying to tease her as usual. She looked down and saw his shabby shoes.

'Come and talk to me,' she said, feeling the old family affection return. She noticed with amusement that he was a little flushed, a little, as the nurses used to say, 'above himself'. How many 'parties' would it need, she wondered, to turn her

satirical, uncompromising cousin into an obedient member of society?

'Let's sit down and talk sense,' she said, sinking on to a little sofa. He sat down beside her.

'Tell me, what's Nell doing?' she asked.

'She sent her love,' said Martin. 'She told me to say how much she wanted to see you.'

'Then why wouldn't she come tonight?' said Kitty. She felt hurt. She could not help it.

'She hasn't the right kind of hairpin,' he said with a laugh, looking down at his shoes. Kitty looked down at them too.

'My shoes, you see, don't matter,' he said. 'But then I'm a man.'

'It's such nonsense . . .' Kitty began. 'What does it matter . . .'

But he was looking round him at the groups of beautifully dressed women; then at the picture.

'That's a horrid daub of you over the mantelpiece,' he said, looking at the red-haired girl. 'Who did it?'

'I forget . . . Don't let's look at it,' she said.

'Let's talk . . .' Then she stopped.

He was looking round the room. It was crowded; there were little tables with photographs; ornate cabinets with vases of flowers; and panels of yellow brocade let into the walls. She felt that he was criticizing the room and herself too.

'I always want to take a knife and scrape it all off,' she said. But what's the use, she thought? If she moved a picture, 'Where's Uncle Bill on the old cob?' her husband would say, and back it had to go again.

'Like a hotel, isn't it?' she continued.

'A saloon,' he remarked. He did not know why he always wanted to hurt her; but he did; it was a fact.

'I was asking myself,' he dropped his voice, 'Why have a picture like that' – he nodded his head at the portrait – 'when they've a Gainsborough . . .'

'And why,' she dropped her voice, imitating his tone that was half sneering, half humorous, 'come and eat their food when you despise them?'

'I don't! Not a bit!' he exclaimed. 'I'm enjoying myself immensely. I like seeing you, Kitty,' he added. It was true – he always liked her. 'You haven't dropped your poor relations. That's very nice of you.'

'It's they who've dropped me,' she said.

'Oh, Eleanor,' he said. 'She's a queer old bird.'

'It's all so . . .' Kitty began. But there was something wro about the disposition of her party; she stopped in the middle her sentence. 'You've got to come and talk to Mrs Treyer,' s said getting up.

Why does one do it? he wondered as he followed her. He h wanted to talk to Kitty; he had nothing to say to that Orient looking harpy with a pheasant's feather floating at the back her head. Still, if you drink the good wine of the noble counte he said bowing, you have to entertain her less desirable frien He led her off.

Kitty went back to the fireplace. She dealt the coal a blo and the sparks went volleying up the chimney. She was ir table; she was restless. Time was passing; if they stayed mu longer she would miss her train. Surreptitiously she noted th the hands of the clock were close on eleven. The party w bound to break up soon; it was only the prelude to anoth party. Yet they were all talking, and talking, as if they wou never go. She glanced at the groups that seemed immovab Then the clock chimed a succession of petulant little strokes, the last of which the door opened and Priestley advanced. Wi his inscrutable butler's eyes and crooked forefinger he sur moned Ann Hillier.

'That's Mama fetching me,' said Ann, advancing down t room with a little flutter.

'She's taking you on?' said Kitty. She held her hand for moment. Why? she asked herself, looking at the love face, empty of meaning, or character, like a page on whi nothing has been written but youth. She held her hand for moment.

'Must you go?' she said.

'I'm afraid I must,' said Ann, withdrawing her hand.

There was a general rising and movement, like the flutter white-winged gulls.

'Coming with us?' Martin heard Ann say to the youth throug whose hair the rake seemed to have been passed. They turned leave together. As she passed Martin, who stood with his har out, Ann gave him the least bend of her head, as if his imag had been already swept from her mind. He was dashed; h feeling was out of all proportion to its object. He felt a stron

esire to go with them, wherever it was. But he had not been sked; Ashton had; he was following in their wake.

'What a toady!' he thought to himself with a bitterness that urprised him. It was odd how jealous he felt for a moment. They were all 'going on', it seemed. He hung about a little awkwardly. Only the old fogies were left – no, even the great man was going on, it seemed. Only the old lady was left. She was hobbling across the room on Lasswade's arm. She wanted to confirm something that she had been saying about a miniature. Lasswade had taken it off the wall; he held it under a lamp so that she could pronounce her verdict. Was it Grandpapa on the cob, or was it Uncle William?

'Sit down, Martin, and let us talk,' said Kitty. He sat down: but he had a feeling that she wanted him to go. He had seen her glance at the clock. They chatted for a moment. Now the old lady came back; she was proving, beyond a doubt, from her unexampled store of anecdotes, that it must be Uncle William on the cob; not Grandpapa. She was going. But she took her time. Martin waited till she was fairly in the doorway, leaning on her nephew's arm. He hesitated; they were alone now; should he stay, or should he go? But Kitty was standing up. She was holding out her hand.

'Come again soon and see me alone,' she said. She had dismissed him, he felt.

That's what people always say, he said to himself as he made his way slowly downstairs behind Lady Warburton. Come again: but I don't know that I shall. . . . Lady Warburton went downstairs like a crab, holding on to the banisters with one hand, to Lasswade's arm with the other. He lingered behind her. He looked at the Canaletto once more. A nice picture: but a copy, he said to himself. He peered over the banisters and saw the black-and-white slabs on the hall beneath.

It did work, he said to himself, descending step by step into the hall. Off and on; by fits and starts. But was it worth it? he asked himself, letting the footman help him into his coat. The double doors stood wide open into the street. One or two people were passing; they peered in curiously, looking at the footmen, at the bright big hall; and at the old lady who paused for a moment on the black-and-white squares. She was robing herself. Now she was accepting her cloak with a violet slash in it; now her furs. A bag dangled from her wrist. She was hung about

with chains; her fingers were knobbed with rings. Her sh stone-coloured face, riddled with lines and wrinkled i creases, looked out from its soft nest of fur and laces. The e were still bright.

The nineteenth century going to bed, Martin said to hims as he watched her hobble down the steps on the arm of l footman. She was helped into her carriage. Then he shook han with that good fellow his host, who had had quite as much wi as was good for him, and walked off through Grosvenor Squa

Upstairs in the bedroom at the top of the house Kitty's m Baxter was looking out of the window, watching the gue drive off. There – that was the old lady going. She wished th would hurry; if the party went on much longer her own lit jaunt would be done for. She was going up the river tomorr with her young man. She turned and looked round her. She h everything ready – her ladyship's coat, skirt, and the bag wi the ticket in it. It was long past eleven. She stood at the dressi table waiting. The three-folded mirror reflected silver po powder puffs, combs and brushes. Baxter stooped down a smirked at herself in the glass – that was how she would lo when she went up the river – then she drew herself up; s heard footsteps in the passage. Her ladyship was coming. He she was.

Lady Lasswade came in, slipping the rings from her finge 'Sorry to be so late, Baxter,' she said. 'Now I must hurry.'

Baxter, without speaking, unhooked her dress; slipped it de terously to her feet, and bore it away. Kitty sat down at h dressing-table and kicked off her shoes. Satin shoes were alwa too tight. She glanced at the clock on her dressing-table. She ju had time.

Baxter was handing her coat. Now she was handing h bag.

'The ticket's in there, m'lady,' she said, touching the bag.

'Now my hat,' said Kitty. She stooped to settle it in front the mirror. The little tweed travelling-hat poised on the top her hair made her look quite a different person; the person s liked being. She stood in her travelling-dress, wondering if s had forgotten anything. Her mind was a perfect blank for moment. Where am I? she wondered. What am I doing? Whe am I going? Her eyes fixed themselves on the dressing-tabl

aguely she remembered some other room, and some other time vhen she was a girl. At Oxford was it?

'The ticket, Baxter?' she said perfunctorily.

'In your bag, m'lady,' Baxter reminded her. She was holding it n her hand.

'So that's everything,' said Kitty, glancing round her.

She felt a moment's compunction.

'Thanks, Baxter,' she said. 'I hope you'll enjoy your . . .' – she esitated: she did not know what Baxter did on her day off – . . . your play,' she said at a venture. Baxter gave a queer little bitten-off smile. Maids bothered Kitty with their demure politeness; with their inscrutable, pursed-up faces. But they were very useful.

'Good-night!' she said to Baxter at the door of the bedroom; for there Baxter turned back as if her responsibility for her mistress ended. Somebody else had charge of the stairs.

Kitty looked in at the drawing-room, in case her husband should be there. But the room was empty. The fire was still blazing; the chairs, drawn out in a circle, still seemed to hold the skeleton of the party in their empty arms. But the car was waiting for her at the door.

'Plenty of time?' she said to the chauffeur as he laid the rug across her knees. Off they started.

It was a clear still night and every tree in the square was visible; some were black, others were sprinkled with strange patches of green artificial light. Above the arc lamps rose shafts of darkness. Although it was close on midnight, it scarcely seemed to be night; but rather some ethereal disembodied day, for there were so many lamps in the streets; cars passing; men in white mufflers with their light overcoats open walking along the clean dry pavements, and many houses were still lit up, for everyone was giving parties. The town changed as they drew smoothly through Mayfair. The public houses were closing; here was a group clustered round a lamp-post at the corner. A drunken man was bawling out some loud song; a tipsy girl with a feather bobbing in her eyes was swaying as she clung to the lamp-post . . . but Kitty's eyes alone registered what she saw. After the talk, the effort and the hurry, she could add nothing to what she saw. And they swept on quickly. Now they had turned, and the car was gliding at full speed up a long bright avenue of great

shuttered shops. The streets were almost empty. The yell station clock showed that they had five minutes to spare.

Just in time, she said to herself The usual exhilaration mo ted in her as she walked along the platform. Diffused li poured down from a great height. Men's cries and the clang of shunting carriages echoed in the immense vacancy. The tr was waiting; travellers were making ready to start. Some w standing with one foot on the step of the carriage drinking c of thick cups as if they were afraid to go far from their sea She looked down the length of the train and saw the engi sucking water from a hose. It seemed all body, all muscle; ev the neck had been consumed into the smooth barrel of t body. This was 'the' train; the others were toys in compariso She snuffed up the sulphrous air, which left a slight tinge of ac at the back of the throat, as if it already had a tang of the nort

The guard had seen her and was coming towards her with l whistle in his hand.

'Good evening, m'lady,' he said.

'Good evening, Purvis. Run it rather fine,' she said as he u locked the door of her carriage.

'Yes, m'lady. Only just in time,' he replied.

He locked the door. Kitty turned and looked round the sma lighted room in which she was to spend the night. Everythi was ready; the bed was made; the sheets were turned dow her bag was on the seat. The guard passed the window, holdi his flag in his hand. A man who had only just caught t train ran across the platform with his arms spread out. A do slammed.

'Just in time,' Kitty said to herself as she stood there. Then t train gave a gentle tug. She could hardly believe that so great monster could start so gently on so long a journey. Then s saw the tea-urn sliding past.

'We're off,' she said to herself, sinking back on to the sea 'We're off!'

All the tension went out of her body. She was alone; and t train was moving. The last lamp on the platform slid away. Th last figure on the platform vanished.

'What fun!' she said to herself, as if she were a little girl wh had run away from her nurse and escaped. 'We're off!'

She sat still for a moment in her brightly lit compartmen

hen she tugged the blind and it sprang up with a jerk. longated lights slid past; lights in factories and warehouses; ghts in obscure back streets. Then there were asphalt paths; nore lights in public gardens; and then bushes and a hedge in a ield. They were leaving London behind them; that blaze of light vhich seemed, as the train rushed into the darkness, to contract tself into one fiery circle. The train rushed with a roar through tunnel. It seemed to perform an act of amputation; now she was cut off from that circle of light.

She looked round the narrow little compartment in which she was isolated. Everything shook slightly. There was a perpetual faint vibration. She seemed to be passing from one world to another; this was the moment of transition. She sat still for a moment; then undressed and paused with her hand on the blind. The train had got into its stride now; it was rushing at full speed through the country. A few distant lights twinkled here and there. Black clumps of trees stood in the grey summer fields; the fields were full of summer grasses. The light from the engine lit up a quiet group of cows; and a hedge of hawthorn. They were in open country now.

She pulled down the blind and climbed into her bed. She laid herself out on the rather hard shelf with her back to the carriage wall, so that she felt a faint vibration against her head. She lay listening to the humming noise which the train made, now that it had got into its stride. Smoothly and powerfully she was being drawn through England to the north. I need do nothing, she thought, nothing, nothing, but let myself be drawn on. She turned and pulled the blue shade over the lamp. The sound of the train became louder in the darkness; its roar, its vibration, seemed to fall into a regular rhythm of sound, raking through her mind, rolling out her thoughts.

Ah, but not all of them, she thought, turning restlessly on her shelf. Some still jutted up. One's not a child, she thought, staring at the light under the blue shade, any longer. The years changed things; destroyed things; heaped things up – worries and bothers; here they were again. Fragments of talk kept coming back to her; sights came before her. She saw herself raise the window with a jerk; and the bristles on Aunt Warburton's chin. She saw the women rising, and the men filing in. She sighed as she turned on her ledge. All their clothes are the same, she thought; all their lives are the same. And which is

right? she thought, turning restlessly on her shelf. Whic
wrong? She turned again.

The train rushed her on. The sound had deepened; it
become a continuous roar. How could she sleep? How could
prevent herself from thinking? She turned away from the li
Now where are we? she said to herself. Where is the train at t
moment? *Now*, she murmured, shutting her eyes, we are pass
the white house on the hill; *now* we are going through
tunnel; *now* we are crossing the bridge over the river. . . .
blank intervened; her thoughts became spaced; they beca
muddled. Past and present became jumbled together. She s
Margaret Marrable pinching the dress in her fingers, but she w
leading a bull with a ring through its nose. . . . This is sleep, s
said to herself, half opening her eyes; thank goodness, she s
to herself, shutting them again, this is sleep. And she resign
herself to the charge of the train, whose roar now beca
dulled and distant.

There was a tap at her door. She lay for a moment, wonderi
why the room shook so; then the scene settled itself; she was
the train; she was in the country; they were nearing the static
She got up.

She dressed rapidly and stood in the corridor. It was st
early. She watched the fields galloping past. They were the ba
fields, the angular fields of the north. The spring was later he
the trees were not fully out yet. The smoke looped down a
caught a tree in its white cloud. When it lifted, she thought ho
fine the light was; clear and sharp, white and grey. The land h
none of the softness, none of the greenness of the land in t
south. But here was the junction; here was the gasometer; th
were running into the station. The train slowed down, and
the lamp-posts on the platform gradually came to a standstill.

She got out and drew in a deep breath of the cold raw air. T
car was waiting for her; and directly she saw it she remember
– it was the new car; a birthday present from her husband. S
had never driven in it yet. Cole touched his hat.

'Let's have it open, Cole,' she said, and he opened the stiff ne
hood, and she got in beside him. Very slowly, for the engi
seemed to beat intermittently, starting and stopping and th
starting again, they moved off. They drove through the tow
all the shops were still shut; women were on their knees scru

ping door-steps; blinds were still drawn in bedrooms and sitting-rooms; there was very little traffic about. Only milk-carts rattled past. Dogs roamed down the middle of the street on private errands of their own. Cole had to hoot again and again.

'They'll learn in time, m'lady,' he said as a great brindled cur slunk out of their way. In the town he drove carefully; but once they were outside he speeded up. Kitty watched the needle jump forward on the speedometer.

'She does it easily?' she asked, listening to the soft purr of the engine.

Cole lifted his foot to show how lightly it touched the accelerator. Then he touched it again and the car sped on. They were driving too fast, Kitty thought; but the road – she kept her eye on it – was still empty. Only two or three lumbering farm waggons passed them; the men went to the horses' heads and held them as they went by. The road stretched pearl-white in front of them; the hedges were decked with the little pointed leaves of early spring.

'Spring's very late up here,' said Kitty; 'cold winds I suppose?'

Cole nodded. He had none of the servile ways of the London flunkey; she was at her ease with him; she could be silent. The air seemed to have different grades of warmth and chill in it; now sweet; now – they were passing a farmyard – strong-smelling, acrid from the sour smell of manure. She leant back, holding her hat to her head as they rushed a hill. 'You won't get her up this on top, Cole,' she said. The pace slackened a little; they were climbing the familiar Crabbs hill, with the yellow streaks where carters had put on their brakes. In the old days, when she drove horses, they used to get out here and walk. Cole said nothing. He was going to show off his engine, she suspected. The car swept up finely. But the hill was long; there was a level stretch; then the road mounted again. The car faltered. Cole coaxed her on. Kitty saw him jerk his body slightly backwards and forwards as if he were encouraging horses. She felt the tension of his muscles. They slowed – they almost stopped. No, now they were on the crest of the hill. She had done it on top!

'Well done!' she exclaimed. He said nothing; but he was very proud, she knew.

'We couldn't have done that on the old car,' she said.

'Ah, but it wasn't her fault,' said Cole.

He was a very humane man; the kind of man she liked, reflected – silent, reserved. On they swept again. Now they w passing the grey stone house where the mad lady lived al with her peacocks and her bloodhounds. They had passed Now the woods were on their right hand and the air ca singing through them. It was like the sea, Kitty thought, lo ing, as they passed, down a dark green drive patched w yellow sunlight. On they went again. Now heaps of rud brown leaves lay by the roadside staining the puddles red.

'It's been raining?' she said. He nodded. They came out on high ridge with woods beneath and there, in a clearing amo the trees, was the grey tower of the Castle. She always look for it and greeted it as if she were raising a hand to a frie They were on their own land now. Gateposts were brand with their initials; their arms swung above the doorways inns; their crest was mounted over cottage doors. Cole looked the clock. The needle leapt again.

Too fast, too fast! Kitty said to herself. But she liked the ru of the wind in her face. Now they reached the Lodge gate; M Preedy was holding it open with a white-haired child on h arm. They rushed through the Park. The deer looked up a hopped away lightly through the fern.

'Two minutes under the quarter, m'lady,' said Cole as th swept in a circle and drew up at the door. Kitty stood fo moment looking at the car. She laid her hand on the bonnet. was hot. She gave it a little pat. 'She did it beautifully, Cole,' s said. 'I'll tell his Lordship.' Cole smiled; he was happy.

She went in. Nobody was about; they had arrived earlier th was expected. She crossed the great stone-flagged hall, with t armour and the busts, and went into the morning-room whe breakfast was laid.

The green light dazzled her as she went in. It was as if s stood in the hollow of an emerald. All was green outside. T statues of grey French ladies stood on the terrace, holding th baskets; but the baskets were empty. In summer flowers wou burn there. Green turf fell down in broad swaths between cli ped yews; dipped to the river; and then rose again to the h that was crested with woods. There was a curl of mist on t woods now – the light mist of early morning. As she gazed a b buzzed in her ear; she thought she heard the murmur of the riv over the stones; pigeons crooned in the tree tops. It was t

voice of early morning, the voice of summer. But the door opened. Here was breakfast.

She breakfasted; she felt warm, stored, and comfortable as she lay back in her chair. And she had nothing to do – nothing whatever. The whole day was hers. It was fine too. The sunlight suddenly quickened in the room, and laid a broad bar of light across the floor. The sun was on the flowers outside. A tortoiseshell butterfly flaunted across the window; she saw it settle on a leaf, and there it sat, opening its wings and shutting them, opening and shutting them, as if it feasted on the sunlight. She watched it. The down was soft rust-red on its wings. Off it flaunted again. Then, admitted by an invisible hand, the chow stalked in; came straight up to her; sniffed at her skirt, and flung himself down in a bright patch of sunlight.

Heartless brute! she thought, but his indifference pleased her. He asked nothing of her either. She stretched her hand for a cigarette. And what would Martin say, she wondered, as she took the enamel box that turned from green to blue, as she opened it. Hideous? Vulgar? Possibly – but what did it matter what people said? Criticism seemed light as smoke this morning. What did it matter what he said, what they said, what anybody said, since she had a whole day to herself? – since she was alone? And there they are, still asleep, in their houses, she thought, standing at the window, looking at the green-grey grass, after their dances, after their parties . . . The thought pleased her. She threw away her cigarette and went upstairs to change her clothes.

The sun was much stronger when she came down again. The garden had already lost its look of purity; the mist was off the woods. She could hear the squeak of the lawn-mower as she stepped out of the window. The rubber-shoed pony was pacing up and down the lawns leaving a pale wake in the grass behind him. The birds were singing in their scattered way. The starlings in their bright mail were feeding on the grass. Dew shone, red, violet, gold on the trembling tips of the grass blades. It was a perfect May morning.

She sauntered slowly along the terrace. As she passed she glanced in at the long windows of the library. Everything was shrouded and shut up. But the long room looked more than usually stately, its proportions seemly; and the brown books in their long rows seemed to exist silently, with dignity, by

themselves, for themselves. She left the terrace and strolled dov the long grass path. The garden was still empty; only a man his shirt sleeves was doing something to a tree; but she nee speak to nobody. The chow stalked after her; he too was siler She walked on past the flower-beds to the river. There sh always stopped, on the bridge, with the cannon-balls at inte vals. The water always fascinated her. The quick northern riv came down from the moors; it was never smooth and gree never deep and placid like southern rivers. It raced; it hurried. splayed itself, red, yellow and clear brown, over the pebbles o the bed. Resting her elbows on the balustrade, she watched eddy round the arches; she watched it make diamonds an sharp arrow streaks over the stones. She listened. She knew th different sounds it made in summer and winter; now it hurrie it raced.

But the chow was bored; he marched on. She followed hin She went up the green ride towards the snuffer-shaped mon ment on the crest of the hill. Every path through the woods ha its name. There was Keepers' Path, Lovers' Walk, Ladies' Mil and here was the Earl's Ride. But before she went into th woods, she stopped and looked back at the house. Times out c number she had stopped here; the Castle looked grey an stately; asleep this morning, with the blinds drawn, and no fla on the flagstaff. Very noble it looked, and ancient, and endurin Then she went on into the woods.

The wind seemed to rise as she walked under the trees. It san in their tops, but it was silent beneath. The dead leaves crackle under foot; among them sprang up the pale spring flowers, th loveliest of the year – blue flowers and white flowers, tremblin on cushions of green moss. Spring was sad always, she thought it brought back memories. All passes, all changes, she thought as she climbed up the little path between the trees. Nothing o this belonged to her; her son would inherit; his wife woul walk here after her. She broke off a twig; she picked a flowe and put it to her lips. But she was in the prime of life; she wa vigorous. She strode on. The ground rose sharply; her muscle felt strong and flexible as she pressed her thick-soled shoes t the ground. She threw away her flower. The trees thinned as sh strode higher and higher. Suddenly she saw the sky betwee two striped tree trunks extraordinarily blue. She came out o the top. The wind ceased; the country spread wide all roun

her. Her body seemed to shrink; her eyes to widen. She threw herself on the ground, and looked over the billowing land that went rising and falling, away and away, until somewhere far off it reached the sea. Uncultivated, uninhabited, existing by itself, for itself, without towns or houses it looked from this height. Dark wedges of shadow, bright breadths of light lay side by side. Then, as she watched, light moved and dark moved; light and shadow went travelling over the hills and over the valleys. A deep murmur sang in her ears – the land itself, singing to itself, a chorus, alone. She lay there listening. She was happy, completely. Time had ceased.

1917

A very cold winter's night, so silent that the air seemed froze
and, since there was no moon, congealed to the stillness of gla
spread over England. Ponds and ditches were frozen; t
puddles made glazed eyes in the roads, and on the pavement t
frost had raised slippery knobs. Darkness pressed on t
windows; towns had merged themselves in open country. N
light shone, save when a searchlight rayed round the sky, a
stopped, here and there, as if to ponder some fleecy patch.

'If that is the river,' said Eleanor, pausing in the dark stre
outside the station, 'Westminster must be there.' The omnib
in which she had come, with its silent passengers looki
cadaverous in the blue light, had already vanished. S
turned.

She was dining with Renny and Maggie, who lived in one
the obscure little streets under the shadow of the Abbey. S
walked on. The further side of the street was almost invisib
The lamps were shrouded in blue. She flashed her torch on to
name on a street corner. Again she flashed her torch. Here it
up a brick wall; there a dark green tuft of ivy. At last t
number thirty, the number she was looking for, shone out. S
knocked and rang at the same moment, for the darkness seem
to muffle sound as well as sight. Silence weighed on her as s
stood there waiting. Then the door opened and a man's voi
said, 'Come in!'

He shut the door behind him, quickly, as if to shut out t
light. It looked strange after the streets – the perambulator
the hall; the umbrellas in the stand; the pictures: they a
seemed intensified.

'Come in!' said Renny again, and led her into the sittin
room ablaze with light. Another man was standing in the roo
and she was surprised because she had expected to find the
alone. But the man was somebody whom she did not know.

For a moment they stared at each other; then Renny sai
'You know Nicholas ...' but he did not speak the surname di

tinctly, and it was so long that she could not catch it. A foreign name, she thought. A foreigner. He was clearly not English. He shook hands with a bow like a foreigner, and he went on talking, as if he were in the middle of a sentence that he wished to finish . . . 'we are talking about Napoleon . . .' he said, turning to her.

'I see,' she said. But she had no notion what he was saying. They were in the middle of an argument, she supposed. But it came to an end without her understanding a word of it, except that it had to do with Napoleon. She took off her coat and laid it down. They stopped talking.

'I will go and tell Maggie,' said Renny. He left them abruptly.

'You were talking about Napolecn?' Eleanor said. She looked at the man whose surname she had not heard. He was very dark; he had a rounded head and dark eyes. Did she like him or not? She did not know.

I've interrupted them, she felt, and I've nothing whatever to say. She felt dazed and cold. She spread her hands over the fire. It was a real fire; wood blocks were blazing; the flame ran along the streaks of shiny tar. A little trickle of feeble gas was all that was left her at home.

'Napoleon,' she said, warming her hands. She spoke without any meaning.

'We were considering the pscyhology of great men,' he said, 'by the light of modern science,' he added with a little laugh. She wished the argument had been more within her reach.

'That's very interesting,' she said shyly.

'Yes – if we knew anything about it,' he said.

'If we knew anything about it . . .' she repeated. There was a pause. She felt numb all over – not only her hands, but her brain.

'The psychology of great men—' she said, for she did not wish him to think her a fool, '. . . was that what you were discussing?'

'We were saying—' He paused. She guessed that he found it difficult to sum up their argument – they had evidently been talking for some time, judging by the newspapers lying about and the cigarette-ends on the table.

'I was saying,' he went on, 'I was saying we do not know ourselves, ordinary people; and if we do not know ourselves, how then can we make religions, laws, that—' he used his hands as people do who find language obdurate, 'that—'

'That fit – that fit,' she said, supplying him with a word th was shorter, she felt sure, than the dictionary word that foreig ers always used.

'—that fit, that fit,' he said, taking the word and repeating it if he were grateful for her help.

'. . . that fit,' she repeated. She had no idea what they we talking about. Then suddenly, as she bent to warm her hand over the fire words floated together in her mind and made o intelligible sentence. It seemed to her that what he had sa was, 'We cannot make laws and religions that fit because we d not know ourselves.'

'How odd that you should say that!' she said, smiling at hi 'because I've so often thought it myself!'

'Why is that odd?' he said. 'We all think the same things; onl we do not say them.'

'Coming along in the omnibus tonight,' she began, 'I wa thinking about this war – I don't feel this, but other people d . . .' She stopped. He looked puzzled; probably she had mi understood what he had said; she had not made her own mean ing plain.

'I mean,' she began again, 'I was thinking as I came along i the bus—'

But here Renny came in.

He was carrying a tray with bottles and glasses.

'It is a great thing,' said Nicholas, 'being the son of a win merchant.'

It sounded like a quotation from the French grammar.

The son of the wine merchant, Eleanor repeated to herself looking at his red cheeks, dark eyes, and large nose. The othe man must be Russian; she thought. Russian, Polish, Jewish? – she had no idea what he was, who he was.

She drank; the wine seemed to caress a knob in her spine Here Maggie came in.

'Good evening,' she said, disregarding the foreigner's bow as i she knew him too well to greet him.

'Papers,' she protested, looking at the litter on the floor 'papers, papers.' The floor was strewn with papers.

'We dine in the basement,' she continued, turning to Eleanor, 'because we've no servants.' She led the way down the steep little stairs.

'But Magdalena,' said Nicholas, as they stood in the little low-

ceilinged room in which dinner was laid, 'Sara said, "We shall meet tomorrow night at Maggie's . . ." She is not here.'

He stood; the others had sat down.

'She will come in time,' said Maggie.

'I shall ring her up,' said Nicholas. He left the room.

'Isn't it much nicer,' said Eleanor, taking her plate, 'not having servants . . .'

'We have a woman to do the washing-up,' said Maggie.

'And we are extremely dirty,' said Renny.

He took up a fork and examined it between the prongs.

'No, this fork, as it happens, is clean,' he said, and put it down again.

Nicholas came back into the room. He looked perturbed. 'She is not there,' he said to Maggie. 'I rang her up, but I could get no answer.'

'Probably she's coming,' said Maggie. 'Or she may have forgotten. . . .'

She handed him his soup. But he sat looking at his plate without moving. Wrinkles had come on his forehead; he made no attempt to hide his anxiety. He was without self-consciousness. 'There!' he suddenly exclaimed, interrupting them as they talked. 'She is coming!' he added. He put down his spoon and waited. Someone was coming slowly down the steep stairs.

The door opened and Sara came in. She looked pinched with the cold. Her cheeks were white here and red there, and she blinked as if she were still dazed from her walk through the blue-shrouded streets. She gave her hand to Nicholas and he kissed it. But she wore no engagement ring, Eleanor observed.

'Yes, we are dirty,' said Maggie, looking at her; she was in her day clothes. 'In rags,' she added, for a loop of gold thread hung down from her own sleeve as she helped the soup.

'I was thinking how beautiful . . .' said Eleanor, for her eyes had been resting on the silver dress with gold threads in it. 'Where did you get it?'

'In Constantinople, from a Turk,' said Maggie.

'A turbaned and fantastic Turk,' Sara murmured, stroking the sleeve as she took her plate. She still seemed dazed.

'And the plates,' said Eleanor, looking at the purple birds on her plate, 'Don't I remember them?' she asked.

'In the cabinet in the drawing-room at home,' said Maggie. 'But it seemed silly – keeping them in a cabinet.'

'We break one every week,' said Renny.

'They'll last the war,' said Maggie.

Eleanor observed a curious mask-like expression come dow over Renny's face as she said 'the war'. Like all the French, sh thought, he cares passionately for his country. But cor tradictorily, she felt, looking at him. He was silent. His silenc oppressed her. There was something formidable about hi silence.

'And why were you so late?' said Nicholas, turning to Sara. H spoke gently, reproachfully, rather as if she were a child. H poured her out a glass of wine.

Take care, Eleanor felt inclined to say to her; the wine goes t one's head. She had not drunk wine for months. She was feelin already a little blurred; a little light-headed. It was the ligh after the dark; talk after silence; the war, perhaps, removin barriers.

But Sara drank. Then she burst out:

'Because of that damned fool.'

'Damned fool?' said Maggie. 'Which?'

'Eleanor's nephew,' said Sara. 'North. Eleanor's nephew, North.' She held her glass towards Eleanor, as if she were addressing her. 'North . . .' Then she smiled. 'There I was, sitting alone. The bell rang. "That's the wash," I said. Footsteps came up the stairs. There was North – North,' she raised her hand to her head as if in salute, 'cutting a figure like this. . . . "What the devil's that for?" I asked. "I leave for the Front tonight," he said, clicking his heels together. "I'm a lieutenant in—" whatever it was – Royal Regiment of Rat-catchers or something. . . . And he hung his cap on the bust of our grandfather. And I poured out tea. "How many lumps of sugar does a lieutenant in the Royal Rat-catchers require?" I asked. "One. Two. Three. Four. . . ." '

She dropped pellets of bread on to the table. As each fell, it seemed to emphasize her bitterness. She looked older, more worn; though she laughed, she was bitter.

'Who is North?' Nicholas asked. He pronounced the word 'North' as if it were a point on the compass.

'My nephew. My brother Morris's son,' Eleanor explained.

'There he sat,' Sara resumed, 'in his mud-coloured uniform, with his switch between his legs, and his ears sticking out on either side of his pink, foolish face, and whatever I said, "Good," he said. "Good," "Good," until I took up the poker and tongs' –

she took up her knife and fork – 'and played "God save the King, Happy and Glorious, Long to reign over us—" ' She held her knife and fork as if they were weapons.

I'm sorry he's gone, Eleanor thought. A picture came before her eyes – the picture of a nice cricketing boy smoking a cigar on a terrace. I'm sorry. . . . Then another picture formed. She was sitting on the same terrace; but now the sun was setting; a maid came out and said, 'The soldiers are guarding the line with fixed bayonets!' That was how she had heard of the war – three years ago. And she had thought, putting down her coffee-cup on a little table, Not if I can help it! overcome by an absurd but vehement desire to protect those hills; she had looked at the hills across the meadow. . . . Now she looked at the foreigner opposite.

'How unfair you are,' Nicholas was saying to Sara. 'Prejudiced; narrow; unfair,' he repeated, tapping her hand with his finger.

He was saying what Eleanor felt herself.

'Yes. Isn't it natural . . .' she began. 'Could you allow the Germans to invade England and do nothing?' she said, turning to Renny. She was sorry she had spoken; and the words were not the ones she had meant to use. There was an expression of suffering, or was it anger? on his face.

'I—' he said. 'I help them to make shells.'

Maggie stood behind him. She had brought in the meat. 'Carve,' she said. He was staring at the meat which she had put down in front of him. He took up the knife and began to carve mechanically.

'Now, Nurse,' she reminded him. He cut another helping.

'Yes,' said Eleanor awkwardly as Maggie took away the plate. She did not know what to say. She spoke without thinking. 'Let's end it as quickly as possible and then . . .' She looked at him. He was silent. He turned away, He had turned to listen to what the others were saying, as if to take refuge from speaking himself,

'Poppycock, poppycock . . . don't talk such damned poppycock – that's what you really said,' Nicholas was saying. His hands were large and clean and the finger-nails were trimmed very close, Eleanor noticed. He might be a doctor, she thought.

'What's "poppy-cock"?' she asked, turning to Renny. For she did not know the word.

'American,' said Renny. 'He's an American,' he said, noddir at Nicholas.

'No,' said Nicholas, turning round, 'I am a Pole'

'His mother was a Princess,' said Maggie as if she were teasin him. That explains the seal on his chain, Eleanor thought. H wore a large old seal on this chain.

'She was,' he said quite seriously. 'One of the noblest familie in Poland. But my father was an ordinary man – a man of th people. ... You should have had more self-control,' he addec turning again to Sara.

'So I should,' she sighed. 'But then he gave his bridle reins shake and said, "Adieu for evermore, adieu for evermore!" ' Sh stretched out her hand and poured herself another glass of wine

'You shall have no more to drink,' said Nicholas, movin away the bottle. 'She saw herself' he explained turning t Eleanor, 'on top of a tower, waving a white handkerchief to knight in armour.'

'And the moon was rising over a dark moor,' Sara murmured touching a pepper-pot.

The pepper-pot's a dark moor, Eleanor thought, looking at it A little blur had come round the edges of things. It was the wine; it was the war. Things seemed to have lost their skins; tc be freed from some surface hardness; even the chair with gilt claws, at which she was looking, seemed porous; it seemed to radiate out some warmth, some glamour, as she looked at it.

'I remember that chair,' she said to Maggie. 'And your mother ...' she added. But she always saw Eugénie not sitting but in movement.

'... dancing,' she added.

'Dancing ...' Sara repeated. She began drumming on the table with her fork.

'When I was young, I used to dance,' she hummed.

'All men loved me when I was young. ... Roses and syringas hung, when I was young, when I was young. D'you remember, Maggie?' She looked at her sister as if they both remembered the same thing.

Maggie nodded. 'In the bedroom. A waltz,' she said.

'A waltz ...' said Eleanor. Sara was drumming a waltz rhythm on the table. Eleanor began to hum in time to it: 'Hoity te, toity te, hoity te. ...'

A long-drawn hollow sound wailed out.

'No, no!' she protested, as if somebody had given her the wrong note. But the sound wailed again.

'A fog-horn?' she said. 'On the river?'

'But as she said it she knew what it was.

The siren wailed again.

'The Germans!' said Renny. 'Those damned Germans!' He put down his knife and fork with an exaggerated gesture of boredom.

'Another raid,' said Maggie, getting up. She left the room; Renny followed her.

'The Germans . . .' said Eleanor as the door shut. She felt as if some dull bore had interrupted an interesting conversation. The colours began to fade. She had been looking at the red chair. It lost its radiance as she looked at it, as if a light had been extinguished underneath.

They heard the rush of wheels in the street. Everything seemed to be going past very quickly. There was the round of feet tapping on the pavement. Eleanor got up and drew the curtains slightly apart. The basement was sunk beneath the pavement, so that she only saw people's legs and skirts as they went past the area railings. Two men came by walking very quickly; then an old woman, with her skirt swinging from side to side, walked past.

'Oughtn't we to ask people in?' she said, turning round. But when she looked back the old woman had disappeared. So had the men. The street was now quite empty. The houses opposite were completely curtained. She drew their own curtain carefully. The table, with the gay china and the lamp, seemed ringed in a circle of bright light as she turned back.

She sat down again. 'D'you mind air raids?' Nicholas asked, looking at her with his inquisitive expression. 'People differ so much.'

'Not at all,' she said. She would have crumbled a piece of bread to show him that she was at her ease; but as she was not afraid, the action seemed to her unnecessary.

'The chances of being hit oneself are so small,' she said. 'What were we saying?' she added.

It seemed to her that they had been saying something extremely interesting; but she could not remember what. They

sat silent for a moment. Then they heard a shuffling on th
stairs.

'The children . . .' said Sara. They heard the dull boom of
gun in the distance.

Here Renny came in.

'Bring your plates,' he said.

'In here.' He led them into the cellar. It was a large cellar. With its crypt-like ceiling and stone walls it had a damp ecclesiastical look. It was used partly for coal, partly for wine. The light in the centre shone on glittering heaps of coal; bottles of wine wrapped in straw lay on their sides on stone shelves. There was a mouldy smell of wine, straw and damp. It was chilly after the dining-room. Sara came in carrying quilts and dressing-gowns which she had fetched from upstairs. Eleanor was glad to wrap herself in a blue dressing-gown; she wrapped it round her and sat holding her plate on her knees. It was cold.

'And now?' said Sara, holding her spoon erect.

They all looked as if they were waiting for something to happen. Maggie came in carrying a plum pudding.

'We may as well finish our dinner,' she said. But she spoke too sensibly; she was anxious about the children, Eleanor guessed. They were in the kitchen. She had seen them as she passed.

'Are they asleep?' she asked.

'Yes. But if the guns . . .' she began, helping the pudding. Another gun boomed out. This time it was distinctly louder.

'They've got through the defences,' said Nicholas.

They began to eat their pudding.

A gun boomed again. This time there was a bark in its boom.

'Hampstead,' said Nicholas. He took out his watch. The silence was profound. Nothing happened. Eleanor looked at the blocks of stone arched over their heads. She noticed a spider's web in one corner. Another gun boomed. A sigh of air rushed up with it. It was right on top of them this time.

'The Embankment,' said Nicholas. Maggie put down her plate and went into the kitchen.

There was profound silence. Nothing happened. Nicholas looked at his watch as if he were timing the guns. There was something queer about him, Eleanor thought; medical, priestly? He wore a seal that hung down from his watch-chain. The number on the box opposite was 1397. She noticed everything.

The Germans must be overhead now. She felt a curious heaviness on top of her head. One, two, three, four, she counted, looking up at the greenish-grey stone. Then there was a violent crack of sound, like the split of lightning in the sky. The spider's web oscillated.

'On top of us,' said Nicholas, looking up. They all looked up. At any moment a bomb might fall. There was dead silence. In the silence they heard Maggie's voice in the kitchen.

'That was nothing. Turn round and go to sleep.' She spoke very calmly and soothingly.

One, two, three, four, Eleanor counted. The spider's web was swaying. That stone may fall, she thought, fixing a certain stone with her eyes. Then a gun boomed again. It was fainter – further away.

'That's over,' said Nicholas. He shut his watch with a click. And they all turned and shifted on their hard chairs as if they had been cramped.

Maggie came in.

'Well, that's over,' she said. ('He woke for a moment, but he went off to sleep again,' she said in an undertone to Renny, 'but the baby slept right through.') She sat down and took the plate that Renny was holding for her.

'Now let's finish our pudding,' she said, speaking in her natural voice.

'Now we will have some wine,' said Renny. He examined one bottle; then another; finally he took a third and wiped it carefully with the tail of his dressing-gown. He placed the bottle on a wooden case and they sat round in a circle.

'It didn't come to much, did it?' said Sara. She was tilting back her chair as she held out her glass.

'Ah, but we were frightened,' said Nicholas. 'Look – how pale we all are.'

They looked at each other. Draped in their quilts and dressing-gowns, against the grey-green walls, they all looked whitish, greenish.

'It's partly the light,' said Maggie. 'Eleanor,' she said, looking at her, 'looks like an abbess.'

The deep-blue dressing-gown which hid the foolish little ornaments, the tabs of velvet and lace on her dress, had improved her appearance. Her middle-aged face was crinkled like an old

glove that has been creased into a multitude of fine lines by the gestures of a hand.

'Untidy, am I?' she said, putting her hand to her hair.

'No. Don't touch it,' said Maggie.

'And what were we talking about before the raid?' Eleanor asked. Again she felt that they had been in the middle of saying something very interesting when they were interrupted. But there had been a complete break; none of them could remember what they had been saying.

'Well, it's over now,' said Sara. 'So let's drink a health – Here's to the New World!' she exclaimed. She raised her glass with a flourish. They all felt a sudden desire to talk and laugh.

'Here's to the New World!' they all cried, raising their glasses, and clinking them together.

The five glasses filled with yellow liquid came together in a bunch.

'To the New World!' they cried and drank. The yellow liquid swayed up and down in their glasses.

'Now, Nicholas,' said Sara, setting her glass down with a tap on the box, 'a speech! A speech!'

'Ladies and gentlemen!' he began, flinging his hand out like an orator. 'Ladies and gentlemen . . .'

'We don't want speeches,' Renny interrupted him.

Eleanor was disappointed. She would have liked a speech. But he seemed to take the interruption good-humouredly; he sat there nodding and smiling.

'Let's go upstairs,' said Renny, pushing away the box.

'And leave this cellar,' said Sara, stretching her arms out, 'this cave of mud and dung. . . .'

'Listen!' Maggie interrupted. She held up her hand. 'I thought I heard the guns again. . . .'

They listened. The guns were still firing, but far away in the distance. There was a sound like the breaking of waves on a shore far away.

'They're only killing other poeple,' said Renny savagely. He kicked the wooden box.

'But you must let us think of something else,' Eleanor protested. The mask had come down over his face.

'And what nonsense, what nonsense Renny talks,' said Nicholas, turning to her privately. 'Only children letting off fireworks in the back garden,' he muttered as he

helped her out of her dressing-gown. They went upstairs.

Eleanor came into the drawing-room. It looked larger than she remembered it, and very spacious and comfortable. Papers were strewn on the floor; the fire was burning brightly; it was warm; it was cheerful. She felt very tired. She sank down into an armchair. Sara and Nicholas had lagged behind. The others were helping the nurse to carry the children up to bed, she supposed. She lay back in the chair. Everything seemed to become quiet and natural again. A feeling of great calm possessed her. It was as if another space of time had been issued to her, but, robbed by the presence of death of something personal, she felt – she hesitated for a word; 'immune?' Was that what she meant? Immune, she said, looking at a picture without seeing it. Immune, she repeated. It was a picture of a hill and a village perhaps in the South of France; perhaps in Italy. There were olive trees; and white roofs grouped against a hillside. Immune, she repeated, looking at the picture.

She could hear a gentle thudding on the floor above; Maggie and Renny were settling the children into their beds again, she supposed. There was a little squeak, like a sleepy bird chirping in its nest. It was very private and peaceful after the guns. But here the others came in.

'Did they mind it?' she said, sitting up, '—the children?'

'No,' said Maggie. 'They slept through it.'

'But they may have dreamt,' said Sara, pulling up a chair. Nobody spoke. It was very quiet. The clocks that used to boom out the hour in Westminster were silent.

Maggie took the poker and struck the wood blocks. The sparks went volleying up the chimney in a shower of gold eyes.

'How that makes me . . .' Eleanor began.

She stopped.

'Yes?' said Nicholas.

'. . . think of my childhood,' she added.

She was thinking of Morris and herself, and old Pippy; but had she told them nobody would know what she meant. They were silent. Suddenly a clear flute-like note rang out in the street below.

'What's that?' said Maggie. She started; she looked at the window; she half rose.

'The bugles,' said Renny, putting out his hand to stop her.

The bugles blew again beneath the window. Then they hea them further down the street; then further away still down t next street. Almost directly the hooting of cars began again, a the rushing of wheels as if the traffic had been released and t usual night life of London had begun again.

'It's over,' said Maggie. She lay back in her chair; she looke very tired for a moment. Then she pulled a basket towards h and began to darn a sock.

'I'm glad I'm alive,' said Eleanor. 'Is that wrong, Renny?' sh asked. She wanted him to speak. It seemed to her that h hoarded immense supplies of emotion that he could not expres He did not answer. He was leaning on his elbow, smoking cigar and looking into the fire.

'I have spent the evening sitting in a coal cellar while othe people try to kill each other above my head,' he said suddenly Then he stretched out and took up a paper.

'Renny, Renny, Renny,' said Nicholas, as if he were ex postulating with a naughty child. He went on reading. The rus of wheels and the hooting of motor cars had run themselve into one continuous sound.

As Renny was reading and Maggie was darning there wa silence in the room. Eleanor watched the fire run along veins o tar and blaze and sink.

'What are you thinking, Eleanor?' Nicholas interrupted her He calls me Eleanor, she thought; that's right.

'About the new world . . .' she said aloud. 'D'you think we'r going to improve?' she asked.

'Yes, yes,' he said, nodding his head.

He spoke quietly as if he did not wish to rouse Renny who was reading, or Maggie who was darning, or Sara who was lying back in her chair half asleep. They seemed to be talking privately, together.

'But how . . .' she began, '. . . how can we improve ourselves . . live more . . .' – she dropped her voice as if she were afraid of wak-ing sleepers – '. . . live more naturally . . . better . . . How can we?

'It is only a question,' he said – he stopped. He drew himsel close to her – 'of learning. The soul . . .' Again he stopped.

'Yes – the soul?' she prompted him.

'The soul – the whole being,' he explained. He hollowed his hands as if to enclose a circle. 'It wishes to expand; to adven-ture; to form – new combinations?'

'Yes, yes,' she said, as if to assure him that his words were right.

'Whereas now,' – he drew himself together; put his feet together; he looked like an old lady who is afraid of mice – 'this is how we live, screwed up into one hard little, tight little – knot?'

'Knot, knot – yes, that's right,' she nodded.

'Each is his own little cubicle; each with his own cross or holy book; each with his fire, his wife . . .'

'Darning socks,' Maggie interrupted.

Eleanor started. She had seemed to be looking into the future. But they had been overheard. Their privacy was ended.

Renny threw down his paper. 'It's all damned rot!' he said. Whether he referred to the paper, or to what they were saying, Eleanor did not know. But talk in private was impossible.

'Why d'you buy them then?' she said, pointing to the papers.

'To light fires with,' said Renny.

Maggie laughed and threw down the sock she was mending. 'There!' she exclaimed. 'Mended. . . .'

Again they sat silent, looking at the fire. Eleanor wished that he would go on talking – the man she called Nicholas. When, she wanted to ask him, when will this new world come? When shall we be free? When shall we live adventurously, wholly, not like cripples in a cave? He seemed to have released something in her; she felt not only a new space of time, but new powers, something unknown within her. She watched his cigarette moving up and down. Then Maggie took the poker and struck the wood and again a shower of red-eyed sparks went volleying up the chimney. We shall be free, we shall be free, Eleanor thought.

'And what have you been thinking all this time?' said Nicholas, laying his hand on Sara's knee. She started. 'Or have you been asleep?' he added.

'I heard what you were saying,' she said.

'What were we saying?' he asked.

'The soul flying upwards like sparks up the chimney,' she said. The sparks were flying up the chimney.

'Not such a bad shot,' said Nicholas.

'Because people always say the same thing,' she laughed. She roused herself and sat up. 'There's Maggie – she says nothing.

There's Renny – he says "What damned rot!" Eleanor sa "That's just what I was thinking." . . . And Nicholas, Nicholas, she patted him on the knee – 'who ought to be in prison, say "Oh my dear friends, let us improve the soul!" '

'Ought to be in prison?' said Eleanor, looking at him.

'Because he loves,' Sara explained. She paused. '—the oth sex, the other sex, you see,' she said lightly, waving her hand the way that was so like her mother's.

For a second a sharp shiver of repugnance passed ove Eleanor's skin as if a knife had sliced it. Then she realized that touched nothing of importance. The sharp shiver passed. Unde neath was – what? She looked at Nicholas. He was watching he

'Does that,' he said, hesitating a little, 'make you dislike m Eleanor?'

'Not in the least! Not in the least!' she exclaimed spon taneously. All the evening, off and on, she had been feelin about him; this, that, and the other; but now all the feeling came together and made one feeling, one whole – liking. 'Not i the least,' she said again. He gave her a little bow. She returne it with a little bow. But the clock on the mantelpiece was stril ing. Renny was yawning. It was late. She got up. She went t the window and parted the curtains and looked out. All th houses were still curtained. The cold winter's night was almos black. It was like looking into the hollow of a dark-blue ston Here and there a star pierced the blue. She had a sense of im mensity and peace – as if something had been consumed. . . .

'Shall I get you a cab?' Renny interrupted.

'No, I'll walk,' she said, turning. 'I like walking in London.'

'We will come with you,' said Nicholas. 'Come, Sara,' he saic She was lying back in her chair swinging her foot up and down

'But I don't want to come,' she said, waving him away. ' want to stay; I want to talk; I want to sing – a hymn of praise a song of thanksgiving. . . .'

'Here is your hat; here is your bag,' said Nicholas, giving then to her.

'Come,' he said, taking her by the shoulder and pushing he out of the room. 'Come.'

Eleanor went up to say good-night to Maggie.

'I should like to stay too,' she said. 'There are so many things should like to talk about—'

'But I want to go to bed – I want to go to bed,' Renny pro

tested. He stood there with his hands stretched above his head, yawning.

Maggie rose. 'So you shall,' she laughed at him.

'Don't bother to come downstairs,' Eleanor protested as he opened the door for her. But he insisted. He is very rude and at the same time very polite, she thought, as she followed him down the stairs. A man who feels many different things, and all passionately, all at the same time, she thought. . . . But they had reached the hall. Nicholas and Sara were standing there.

'Cease to laugh at me for once, Sara,' Nicholas was saying as he put on his coat.

'And cease to lecture me,' she said, opening the front door.

Renny smiled at Eleanor as they stood for a moment by the perambulator.

'Educating themselves!' he said.

'Good-night,' she said, smiling as she shook hands. That is the man, she said to herself, with a sudden rush of conviction, as she came out into the frosty air, that I should like to have married. She recognized a feeling which she had never felt. But he's twenty years younger than I am, she thought, and married to my cousin. For a moment she resented the passage of time and the accidents of life which had swept her away – from all that, she said to herself. And a scene came before her; Maggie and Renny sitting over the fire. A happy marriage, she thought, that's what I was feeling all the time. A happy marriage. She looked up as she walked down the dark little street behind the others. A broad fan of light, like the sail of a windmill, was sweeping slowly across the sky. It seemed to take what she was feeling and to express it broadly and simply, as if another voice were speaking in another language. Then the light stopped and examined a fleecy patch of sky, a suspected spot.

The raid! she said to herself. I'd forgotten the raid!

The others had come to the crossing; there they stood.

'I'd forgotten the raid!' she said aloud as she came up with them. She was surprised; but it was true.

They were in Victoria Street. The street curved away, looking wider and darker than usual. Little figures were hurrying along the pavement; they emerged for a moment under a lamp, then vanished into darkness again. The street was very empty.

'Will the omnibuses be running as usual?' Eleanor asked as they stood there.

They looked round them. Nothing was coming along street at the moment.

'I shall wait here,' said Eleanor.

'Then I shall go,' said Sara abruptly. 'Good-night!'

She waved her hand and walked away. Eleanor took it f granted that Nicholas would go with her.

'I shall wait here,' she repeated.

But he did not move. Sara had already vanished. Elean looked at him. Was he angry? Was he unhappy? She did n know. But here a great form loomed up through the darknes its lights were shrouded with blue paint. Inside silent people s huddled up; they looked cadaverous and unreal in the blu light. 'Good-night,' she said, shaking hands with Nicholas. Sh looked back and saw him still standing on the pavement. He sti held his hat in his hand. He looked tall, impressive and solitar standing there alone, while the searchlights wheeled across th sky.

The omnibus moved on. She found herself staring at an ol man in the corner who was eating something out of a paper ba He looked up and caught her staring at him.

'Like to see what I've got for supper, lady?' he said, cockin one eyebrow over his rheumy, twinkling old eyes. And he hel out for her inspection a hunk of bread on which was laid a slic of cold meat or sausage.

1918

A veil of mist covered the November sky; a many folded veil, so fine-meshed that it made one density. It was not raining, but here and there the mist condensed on the surface into dampness and made pavements greasy. Here and there on a grass blade or on a hedge leaf a drop hung motionless. It was windless and calm. Sounds coming through the veil – the bleat of sheep, the croak of rooks – were deadened. The uproar of the traffic merged into one growl. Now and then as if a door opened and shut, or the veil parted and closed, the roar boomed and faded.

'Dirty brute,' Crosby muttered as she hobbled along the asphalt path across Richmond Green. Her legs were paining her. It was not actually raining, but the great open space was full of mist; and there was nobody near, so that she could talk aloud.

'Dirty brute,' she muttered again. She had got into the habit of talking aloud. There was nobody in sight; the end of the path was lost in mist. It was very silent. Only the rooks gathered on the tree tops now and then let fall a queer little croak, and a leaf, spotted with black, fell to the ground. Her face twitched as she walked, as if her muscles had got into the habit of protesting, involuntarily, against the spites and obstacles that tormented her. She had aged greatly during the past four years. She looked so small and hunched that it seemed doubtful if she could make her way across the wide open space, shrouded in white mist. But she had to go to the High Street to do her shopping.

'The dirty brute,' she muttered again. She had had some words that morning with Mrs Burt about the Count's bath. He spat in it, and Mrs Burt had told her to clean it.

'Count indeed – he's no more Count than you are,' she continued. She was talking to Mrs Burt now. 'I'm quite willing to oblige you,' she went on. Even out here, in the mist, where she was free to say what she liked, she adopted a conciliatory tone, because she knew that they wanted to be rid of her. She gesticulated with the hand that was not carrying the bag as she told

Louisa that she was quite ready to oblige her. She hobbled o
'And I shouldn't mind going either,' she added bitterly, but th
was spoken to herself only. It was no pleasure to her to live
the house any more; but there was nowhere else for her to g
that the Burts knew very well.

'And I'm quite ready to oblige you,' she added aloud, a
indeed she had said to Louisa herself. But the truth was that sh
was no longer able to work as she had done. Her legs pained he
It took all the strength out of her to do her own shopping, le
alone to clean the bath. But it was all take-it-or-leave-it now. I
the old days she would have sent the whole lot packing.

'Drabs ... hussies,' she muttered. She was now addressing th
red-haired servant girl who had flung out of the house yesterda
without warning. *She* could easily get another job. It didn'
matter to her. So it was left to Crosby to clean the Count's bath.

'Dirty brute, dirty brute,' she repeated; her pale-blue eye
glared impotently. She saw once more the blob of spittle tha
the Count had left on the side of his bath – the Belgian wh
called himself a Count. 'I've been used to work for gentlefolk
not for dirty foreigners like you,' she told him as she hobbled.

The roar of traffic sounded louder as she approached th
ghostly line of trees. She could see houses now beyond the trees
Her pale-blue eyes peered forward through the mist as she mad
her way towards the railings. Her eyes alone seemed to expres
an unconquerable determination; she was not going to give in
she was bent on surviving. The soft mist was slowly lifting
Leaves lay damp and purple on the asphalt path. The rook
croaked and shuffled on the tree tops. Now a dark line of railings emerged from the mist. The roar of traffic in the Hig
Street sounded louder and louder. Crosby stopped and rested he
bag on the railing before she went on to do battle with th
crowd of shoppers in the High Street. She would have to shov
and push, and be jostled this way and that, and her feet pained
her. They didn't mind if you bought or not, she thought; an
often she was pushed out of her place by some bold-faced drab
She thought of the red-haired girl again, as she stood there, panting slightly, with her bag on the railing. Her legs pained her.
Suddenly the long-drawn note of a siren floated out its melancholy wail of sound; then there was a dull explosion.

'Them guns again,' Crosby muttered, looking up at the pale-grey sky with peevish irritation. The rooks, scared by the gun-

fire, rose and wheeled round the tree tops. Then there was another dull boom. A man on a ladder who was painting the windows of one of the houses paused with his brush in his hand and looked round. A woman who was walking along carrying a loaf of bread that stuck half out of its paper wrapping stopped too. They both waited as if for something to happen. A topple of smoke drifted over and flopped down from the chimneys. The guns boomed again. The man on the ladder said something to the woman on the pavement. She nodded her head. Then he dipped his brush in the pot and went on painting. The woman walked on. Crosby pulled herself together and tottered across the road into the High Street. The guns went on booming and the sirens wailed. The war was over – so somebody told her as she took her place in the queue at the grocer's shop. The guns went on booming and the sirens wailed.

PRESENT DAY

It was a summer evening; the sun was setting; the sky was bl still, but tinged with gold, as if a thin veil of gauze hung over and here and there in the gold-blue amplitude an island of clo lay suspended. In the fields the trees stood majestically ca risoned, with their innumerable leaves gilt. Sheep and cov pearl white and parti-coloured, lay recumbent or munched the way through the half transparent grass. An edge of light su rounded everything. A red-gold fume rose from the dust on t roads. Even the little red brick villas on the high roads h become porous, incandescent with light, and the flowers in co tage gardens, lilac and pink like cotton dresses, shone veined if lit from within. Faces of people standing at cottage doors padding along pavements showed the same red glow as the fronted the slowly sinking sun.

Eleanor came out of her flat and shut the door. Her face w lit up by the glow of the sun as it sank over London, and for moment she was dazzled and looked out over the roofs a spires that lay beneath. There were people talking inside h room, and she wanted to have a word with her nephew alon North, her brother Morris's son, had just come back fro Africa, and she had scarcely seen him alone. So many peop had dropped in that evening – Miriam Parrish; Ralph Pickersgil Antony Wedd; her niece Peggy, and on top of them all, th very talkative man, her friend Nicholas Pomjalovsky, who they called Brown for short. She had scarcely had a word wit North alone. For a moment they stood in the bright square sunshine that fell on the stone floor of the passage. Voices we still talking within. She put her hand on his shoulder.

'It's so nice to see you,' she said. 'And you haven't change ...' She looked at him. She still saw traces of the brown-eye cricketing boy in the massive man, who was so burnt, and little grey too over the ears. 'We shan't let you go back,' sh continued, beginning to walk downstairs with him, 'to th horrid farm.'

He smiled. 'And you haven't changed either,' he said.

She looked very vigorous. She had been in India. Her face was tanned with the sun. With her white hair and her brown cheeks she scarcely looked her age, but she must be well over seventy, he was thinking. They walked downstairs arm-in-arm. There were six flights of stone steps to descend, but she insisted upon coming all the way down with him, to see him off.

'And North,' she said, when they reached the hall, 'you will be careful. . . .' She stopped on the doorstep. 'Driving in London,' she said, 'isn't the same as driving in Africa.'

There was his little sports car outside; a man was going past the door in the evening sunlight crying 'Old chairs and baskets to mend.'

He shook his head; his voice was drowned by the voice of the man crying. He glanced at a board that hung in the hall with names on it. Who was in and who was out was signified with a care that amused him slightly, after Africa. The voice of the old man crying 'Old chairs and baskets to mend,' slowly died away.

'Well, good-bye, Eleanor,' he said turning. 'We shall meet later.' He got into his car.

'Oh, but North—' she cried, suddenly remembering something she wanted to say to him. But he had turned on the engine; he did not hear her voice. He waved his hand to her – there she stood at the top of the steps with her hair blowing in the wind. The car started off with a jerk. She gave another wave of her hand to him as he turned the corner.

Eleanor is just the same, he thought: more erratic perhaps. With a room full of people – her little room had been crowded – she had insisted upon showing him her new shower-bath. 'You press that knob,' she had said, 'and look—' Innumerable needles of water shot down. He laughed aloud. They had sat on the edge of the bath together.

But the cars behind him hooted persistently; they hooted and hooted. What at? he asked. Suddenly he realized that they were hooting at him. The light had changed; it was green now, he had been blocking the way. He started off with a violent jerk. He had not mastered the art of driving in London.

The noise of London still seemed to him deafening, and the speed at which people drove was terrifying; but it was exciting after Africa. The shops even, he thought, as he shot past rows of plate-glass windows, were marvellous. Along the kerb, too,

there were barrows of fruit and flowers. Everywhere there profusion; plenty. . . . Again the red light shone out; he pu up.

He looked about him. He was somewhere in Oxford Stre the pavement was crowded with people; jostling each oth swarming round the plate-glass windows which were still lit The gaiety, the colour, the variety, were amazing after Afri All these years, he thought to himself, looking at a floati banner of transparent silk, he had been used to raw goods; hid and fleeces; here was the finished article. A dressing-case, yellow leather fitted with silver bottles, caught his eye. But t light was green again. On he jerked.

He had only been back ten days, and his mind was a jumb of odds and ends. It seemed to him that he had never stoppe talking: shaking hands; saying How-d'you-do? People sprang u everywhere; his father; his sister; old men got up from arm chairs and said, You don't remember me? Children he had left i the nursery were grown-up men at college; girls with pigtai were now married women. He was still confused by it all; the talked so fast; they must think him very slow, he thought. H had to withdraw into the window and say, 'What, what, wha do they mean by it?'

For instance, this evening at Eleanor's there was a man ther with a foreign accent who squeezed lemon into his tea. Wh might he be, he wondered? 'One of Nell's dentists,' said his siste Peggy, wrinkling her lip. For they all had lines cut; phrase ready-made. But that was the silent man on the sofa. It was th other one he meant – squeezing lemon in his tea. 'We call hin Brown,' she murmured. Why Brown if he's a foreigner, he wondered. Anyhow they all romanticized solitude and savagery – ' wish I'd done what you did,' said a little man called Pickersgill – except this man Brown, who had said something that intereste him. 'If we do not know ourselves, how can we know othe people?' he had said. They had been discussing dictators; Napoleon; the psychology of great men. But there was the gree light – 'GO'. He shot on again. And then the lady with the earrings gushed about the beauties of Nature. He glanced at the name of the street on the left. He was going to dine with Sara but he had not much notion how to get there. He had only heard her voice on the telephone saying, 'Come and dine with me – Milton Street, fifty-two, my name's on the door.' It was

near the Prison Tower. But this man Brown – it was difficult to place him at once. He talked, spreading his fingers out with the volubility of a man who will in the end become a bore. And Eleanor wandered about, holding a cup, telling people about her shower-bath. He wished they would stick to the point. Talk interested him. Serious talk on abstract subjects. 'Was solitude good; was society bad?' That was interesting; but they hopped from thing to thing. When the large man said, 'Solitary confinement is the greatest torture we inflict,' the meagre old woman with the wispy hair at once piped up, laying her hand on her heart, 'It ought to be abolished!' She visited prisons, it seemed.

'Where the dickens am I now?' he asked, peering at the name on the street corner. Somebody had chalked a circle on the wall with a jagged line in it. He looked down the long vista. Door after door, window after window, repeated the same pattern. There was a red-yellow glow over it all, for the sun was sinking through the London dust. Everything was tinged with a warm yellow haze. Barrows full of fruit and flowers were drawn up at the kerb. The sun gilded the fruit; the flowers had a blurred brilliance; there were roses, carnations and lilies too. He had half a mind to stop and buy a bunch to take to Sally. But the cars were hooting behind him. He went on. A bunch of flowers, he thought, held in the hand would soften the awkwardness of meeting and the usual things that had to be said. 'How nice to see you – you've filled out,' and so on. He had only heard her voice on the telephone, and people changed after all these years. Whether this was the right street or not, he could not be sure; he filtered slowly round the corner. Then stopped; then went on again. This was Milton Street, a dusky street, with old houses, now let out as lodgings; but they had seen better days.

'The odds on that side; the evens on this,' he said. The street was blocked with vans. He hooted. He stopped. He hooted again. A man went to the horse's head, for it was a coal-cart, and the horse slowly plodded on. Fifty-two was just along the row. He dribbled up to the door. He stopped.

A voice pealed out across the street, the voice of a woman singing scales.

'What a dirty,' he said, as he sat still in the car for a moment – here a woman crossed the street with a jug under her arm – 'sordid,' he added, 'low-down street to live in.' He cut off his

engine; got out, and examined the names on the door. Nan mounted one above another; here on a visiting-card, here graved on brass – Foster; Abrahamson; Roberts; S. Pargiter w near the top, punched on a strip of aluminium. He rang one the many bells. No one came. The woman went on singi scales, mounting slowly. The mood comes, the mood goes, thought. He used to write poetry; now the mood had con again as he stood there waiting. He pressed the bell two or thr times sharply. But no one answered. Then he gave the door push; it was open. There was a curious smell in the hall; vegetables cooking; and the oily brown paper made it dark. H went up the stairs of what had once been a gentleman's res dence. The banisters were carved; but they had been daube over with some cheap yellow varnish. He mounted slowly an stood on the landing, uncertain which door to knock at. He wa always finding himself now outside the doors of strange house He had a feeling that he was no one and nowhere in particula From across the road came the voice of the singer deliberatel ascending the scale, as if the notes were stairs; and here sh stopped indolently, languidly, flinging out the voice that wa nothing but pure sound. Then he heard somebody inside, laugh ing.

That's her voice, he said. But there is somebody with her. H was annoyed. He had hoped to find her alone. The voice wa speaking and did not answer when he knocked. Very cautiousl he opened the door and went in.

'Yes, yes, yes,' Sara was saying. She was kneeling at the tele phone talking; but there was nobody there. She raised her han when she saw him and smiled at him; but she kept her han raised as if the noise he had made caused her to lose what sh was trying to hear.

'What?' she said, speaking into the telephone. 'What?' H stood silent, looking at the silhouettes of his grandparents o the mantelpiece. There were no flowers, he observed. He wishe he had brought her some. He listened to what she was saying he tried to piece it together.

'Yes, now I can hear. . . . Yes, you're right. Someone has com in. . . . Who? North. My cousin from Africa. . . .'

That's me, North thought. 'My cousin from Africa.' That's my label.

'You've met him?' she was saying. There was a pause. 'D'you

think so?' she said. She turned and looked at him. They must be discussing him, he thought. He felt uncomfortable.

'Good-bye,' she said, and put down the telephone.

'He says he met you tonight,' she said, going up to him and taking his hand. 'And liked you,' she added, smiling.

'Who was that?' he asked, feeling awkward; but he had no flowers to give her.

'A man you met at Eleanor's,' she said.

'A foreigner?' he asked.

'Yes. Called Brown,' she said, pushing up a chair for him.

He sat down on the chair she had pushed out for him, and she curled up opposite with her foot under her. He remembered the attitude; she came back in sections; first the voice; then the attitude; but something remained unknown.

'You've not changed,' he said – the face he meant. A plain face scarcely changed; whereas beautiful faces wither. She looked neither young nor old; but shabby; and the room, with the pampas grass in a pot in the corner, was untidy. A lodging-house room tidied in a hurry he guessed.

'And you—' she said, looking at him. It was as if she were trying to put two different versions of him together; the one on the telephone perhaps and the one on the chair. Or was there some other? This half knowing people, this half being known, this feeling of the eye on the flesh, like a fly crawling – how uncomfortable it was, he thought; but inevitable, after all these years. The tables were littered; he hesitated, holding his hat in his hand. She smiled at him, as he sat there, holding his hat uncertainly.

'Who's the young Frenchman,' she said, 'with the top hat in the picture?'

'What picture?' he asked.

'The one who sits looking puzzled with his hat in his hand,' she said. He put his hat on the table, but awkwardly. A book fell to the floor.

'Sorry,' he said. She meant, presumably, when she compared him to the puzzled man in the picture, that he was clumsy; he always had been.

'This isn't the room where I came last time?' he asked.

He recognized a chair – a chair with gilt claws; there was the usual piano.

'No – that was on the other side of the river,' she said, 'when you came to say good-bye.'

He remembered. He had come to her the evening before left for the war; and he had hung his cap on the bust of th grandfather – that had vanished. And she had mocked him.

'How many lumps of sugar does a lieutenant in His Majest Royal Regiment of Rat-catchers require?' she had sneered. could see her now dropping lumps of sugar into his tea. A they had quarrelled. And he had left her. It was the night of t raid, he remembered. He remembered the dark night; t searchlights that slowly swept over the sky; here and there th stopped to ponder a fleecy patch; little pellets of shot fell; ar people scudded along the empty blue shrouded streets. He ha been to Kensington to dine with his family; he had said goo bye to his mother; he had never seen her again.

The voice of the singer interrupted. 'Ah – h-h, oh-h-h, ah – h- oh – h-h,' she sang, languidly climbing up and down the sca on the other side of the street.

'Does she go on like that every night?' he asked. Sara nodde The notes coming through the humming evening air sound slow and sensuous. The singer seemed to have endless leisur she could rest on every stair.

And there was no sign of dinner, he observed; only a dish fruit on the cheap lodging-house table-cloth, already yellowe with some gravy stain.

'Why d'you always choose slums—' he was beginning, f children were screaming in the street below, when the doo opened and a girl came in carrying a bunch of knives and fork The regular lodging-house skivvy, North thought; with re hands, and one of those jaunty white caps that girls in lodgin houses clap on top of their hair when the lodger has a party. her presence they had to make conversation. 'I've been seein Eleanor,' he said. 'That was where I met your friend Brown. . .

The girl made a clatter laying the table with the knives an forks she held in a bunch.

'Oh, Eleanor,' said Sara. 'Eleanor—' But she watched the gi going clumsily round the table; she breathed rather hard as sh laid it.

'She's just back from India,' he said. He too watched the gi laying the table. Now she stood a bottle of wine among th cheap lodging-house crockery.

'Gallivanting round the world,' Sara murmured.

'And entertaining the oddest set of old fogies,' he added. H

hought of the little man with the fierce blue eyes who wished ie had been in Africa; and the wispy woman with beads who visited prisons it seemed.

'. . . and that man, your friend—' he began. Here the girl went out of the room, but she left the door open, a sign that she was about to come back.

'Nicholas,' said Sara, finishing his sentence. 'The man you call Brown.'

There was a pause. 'And what did you talk about?' she asked.

He tried to remember.

'Napoleon; the psychology of great men; if we don't know ourselves how can we know other people . . .' He stopped. It was difficult to remember accurately what had been said even one hour ago.

'And then,' she said, holding out one hand and touching a finger exactly as Brown had done, '. . . how can we make laws, religions, that fit, that fit, when we don't know ourselves?'

'Yes! Yes!' he exclaimed. She had caught his manner exactly; the slight foreign accent; the repetition of the little word 'fit', as if he were not quite sure of the shorter words in English.

'And Eleanor,' Sara continued, 'says . . . "Can we improve – can we improve ourselves?" sitting on the edge of the sofa?'

'Of the bath,' he laughed, correcting her.

'You've had that talk before,' he said. That was precisely what he was feeling. They had talked before. 'And then,' he continued, 'we discussed . . .'

But here the girl burst in again. She had plates in her hand this time; blue-ringed plates, cheap lodging-house plates: '—society or solitude; which is best,' he finished his sentence.

Sara kept looking at the table. 'And which,' she asked, in the distracted way of someone who with their surface senses watches what is being done, but at the same time thinks of something else '—which did you say? You who've been alone all these years,' she said. The girl left the room again. '—among your sheep, North.' She broke off; for now a trombone player had struck up in the street below, and as the voice of the woman practising her scales continued, they sounded like two people trying to express completely different views of the world in general at one and the same time. The voice ascended; the trombone wailed. They laughed.

'... Sitting on the verandah,' she resumed, 'looking a
stars.'

He looked up: was she quoting something? He remember
had written to her when he first went out. 'Yes, looking a
stars,' he said.

'Sitting on the verandah in silence,' she added. A van v
past the window. All sounds were for the moment obliterat

'And then ...' she said as the van rattled away – she pause
if she were referring to something else that he had written.

'—then you saddled a horse,' she said, 'and rode away!'

She jumped up, and for the first time he saw her face in
full light. There was a smudge on the side of her nose.

'D'you know,' he said, looking at her, 'that you've a smu
on your face?'

She touched the wrong cheek.

'Not that side – the other,' he said.

She left the room without looking in the glass. From wh
we deduce the fact, he said to himself, as if he were writin
novel, that Miss Sara Pargiter has never attracted the love
men. Or had she? He did not know. These little snapshot pictu
of people left much to be desired, there little surface pictu
that one made, like a fly crawling over a face, and feeling, he
the nose, here's the brow.

He strolled to the window. The sun must be setting, for
brick of the house at the corner blushed a yellowish pink. (
or two high windows were burnished gold. The girl was in
room, and she distracted him; also the noise of London
bothered him. Against the dull background of traffic noises
wheels turning and brakes squeaking, there rose near at h
the cry of a woman suddenly alarmed for her child; the mo
onous cry of a man selling vegetables; and far away a ba
organ was playing. It stopped; it began again. I used to write
her, he thought, late at night, when I felt lonely, when I
young. He looked at himself in the glass. He saw his sunbu
face with the broad cheek bones and the little brown eyes.

The girl had been sucked down into the lower portion of
house. The door stood open. Nothing seemed to be happeni
He waited. He felt an outsider. After all these years, he thoug
everyone was paired off; settled down; busy with their o
affairs. You found them telephoning, remembering other c

versations; they went out of the room; they left one alone. He took up a book and read a sentence.

'A shadow like an angel with bright hair . . .'

Next moment she came in. But there seemed to be some hitch in the proceedings. The door was open; the table laid; but nothing happened. They stood together, waiting, with their backs to the fireplace.

'How strange it must be,' she resumed, 'coming back after all these years – as if you'd dropped from the clouds in an aeroplane,' she pointed to the table as if that were the field in which he had landed.

'On to an unknown land,' said North. He leant forward and touched a knife on the table.

'—and finding people talking,' she added.

'—talking, talking,' he said, 'about money and politics,' he added, giving the fender behind him a vicious little kick with his heel.

Here the girl came in. She wore an air of importance derived apparently from the dish she carried, for it was covered with a great metal cover. She raised the cover with a certain flourish. There was a leg of mutton underneath. 'Let's dine,' said Sara.

'I'm hungry,' he added.

They sat down and she took the carving-knife and made a long incision. A thin trickle of red juice ran out; it was underdone. She looked at it.

'Mutton oughtn't to be like that,' she said. 'Beef – but not mutton.'

They watched the red juice running down into the well of the dish.

'Shall we send it back,' she said, 'or eat it as it is?'

'Eat it,' he said. 'I've eaten far worse joints than this,' he added.

'In Africa . . .' she said, lifting the lids of the vegetable dishes. There was a slabbed-down mass of cabbage in one oozing green water; in the other, yellow potatoes that looked hard.

'. . . in Africa, in the wilds of Africa,' she resumed, helping him to cabbage, 'in that farm you were on, where no one came for months at a time, and you sat on the verandah listening—'

'To sheep,' he said. He was cutting his mutton in strips. It was tough.

'And there was nothing to break the silence,' she went helping herself to potatoes, 'but a tree falling, or a rock break from the side of a distant mountain—' She looked at him as i verify the sentences that she was quoting from his letters.

'Yes,' he said. 'It was very silent.'

'And hot,' she added. 'Blazing hot at midday: an old tra tapped on your door . . .?'

He nodded. He saw himself again, a young man, and v lonely.

'And then—' she began again. But a great lorry came crashi down the street. Something rattled on the table. The walls a the floor seemed to tremble. She parted two glasses that w jingling together. The lorry passed; they heard it rumbling aw in the distance.

'And the birds,' she went on. 'The nightingales, singing in t moonlight?'

He felt uncomfortable at the vision she called up. 'I m have written you a lot of nonsense!' he exclaimed. 'I wish yo torn them up – those letters!'

'No! They were beautiful letters! Wonderful letters!' she e claimed, raising her glass. A thimbleful of wine always ma her tipsy, he remembered. Her eyes shone; her cheeks glowed.

'And then you had a day off,' she went on, 'and jolted alon rough white road in a springless cart to the next town—'

'Sixty miles away,' he said.

'And went to a bar; and met a man from the next – ranc She hesitated as if the word might be the wrong one.

'Ranch, yes, ranch,' he confirmed her. 'I went to the town a had a drink at the bar—'

'And then?' she said. He laughed. There were some things had not told her. He was silent.

'Then you stopped writing,' she said. She put her glass dow

'When I forgot what you were like,' he said, looking at her.

'You gave up writing too,' he said.

'Yes, I too,' she said.

The trombone had moved his station and was wailing lug briously under the window. The doleful sound, as if a dog h thrown back its head and were baying the moon, floated up them. She waved her fork in time to it.

'Our hearts full of tears, our lips full of laughter, we passed the stairs' – she dragged her words out to fit the wail of t

trombone – 'we passed on the stair-r-r-r-s' – but here the trombone changed its measure to a jig. 'He to sorrow, I to bliss,' she jigged with it, 'he to bliss and I to sorrow, we passed on the stair-r-r-s.'

She set her glass down.

'Another cut off the joint?' she asked.

'No, thank you,' he said, looking at the rather stringy disagreeable object which was still bleeding into the well. The willow-pattern plate was daubed with gory streaks. She stretched her hand out and rang the bell. She rang; she rang a second time. No one came.

'Your bells don't ring,' he said.

'No,' she smiled. 'The bells don't ring, and the taps don't run.' She thumped on the floor. They waited. No one came. The trombone wailed outside.

'But there was one letter you wrote me,' he continued as they waited. 'An angry letter; a cruel letter.'

He looked at her. She had lifted her lip like a horse that is going to bite. That, too, he remembered.

'Yes?' she said.

'The night you came in from the Strand,' he reminded her.

Here the girl came in with the pudding. It was an ornate pudding, semi-transparent, pink, ornamented with blobs of cream.

'I remember,' said Sara, sticking her spoon into the quivering jelly, 'a still autumn night; the lights lit; and people padding along the pavement with wreaths in their hands?'

'Yes,' he nodded. 'That was it.'

'And I said to myself,' she paused, 'this is Hell. We are the damned?' He nodded.

She helped him to pudding.

'And I,' he said, as he took his plate, 'was among the damned.' He stuck his spoon into the quivering mass that she had given him.

'Coward; hypocrite, with your switch in your hand; and your cap on your head—' He seemed to quote from a letter that she had written him. He paused. She smiled at him.

'But what was the word – the word I used?' she asked, as if she were trying to remember.

'Poppycock!' he reminded her. She nodded.

'And then I went over the bridge,' she resumed, raising her

spoon half-way to her mouth, 'and stopped in one of those alcoves, bays, what d'you call 'em? – scooped out over the w and looked down—' She looked down at her plate.

'When you lived on the other side of the river,' he prom her.

'Stood and looked down,' she said, looking at her glass w she held in front of her, 'and thought; Running water, flov water, water that crinkles up the lights; moonlight; starligh She drank and was silent.

'Then the car came,' he prompted her.

'Yes; the Rolls-Royce. It stopped in the lamplight and t they sat—'

'Two people,' he reminded her.

'Two people. Yes,' she said. 'He was smoking a cigar. upper-class Englishman with a big nose, in a dress suit. And sitting beside him, in a fur-trimmed cloak, took advantage of pause under the lamplight to raise her hand' – she raised hand – 'and polish that spade, her mouth.'

She swallowed her mouthful.

'And the peroration?' he prompted her.

She shook her head.

They were silent. North had finished his pudding. He took his cigarette-case. Save for a dish of rather fly-brown fr apples and bananas, there was no more to eat apparently.

'We were very foolish when we were young, Sal,' he said he lit his cigarette, 'writing purple passages ...'

'At dawn with the sparrows chirping,' she said, pulling plate of fruit towards her. She began peeling a banana, as if were unsheathing some soft glove. He took an apple and pee it. The curl of apple-skin lay on his plate, coiled up like a snal skin, he thought; and the banana-skin was like the finger c glove that had been ripped open.

The street was now quiet. The woman had stopped singi The trombone-player had moved off. The rush hour was o and nothing went down the street. He looked at her, biting li bits off her banana.

When she came to the fourth of June, he remembered, wore her skirt the wrong way round. She was crooked in th days too; and they had laughed at her – he and Peggy. She l never married; he wondered why not. He swept up the brok coils of apple-peel on his plate.

'What does he do,' he said suddenly, '—that man who throws his hands out?'

'Like this?' she said. She threw her hands out.

'Yes,' he nodded. That was the man – one of those voluble foreigners with a theory about everything. Yet he had liked him – he gave off an aroma; a whirr; his flexible supple face worked amusingly; he had a round forehead; good eyes; and was bald.

'What does he do?' he repeated.

'Talks,' she replied, 'about the soul.' She smiled. Again he felt an outsider; so many talks there must have been between them; such intimacy.

'About the soul,' she continued, taking a cigarette. 'Lectures,' she added, lighting it. 'Ten and six for a seat in the front row,' she puffed her smoke out. 'There's standing room at half a crown; but then,' she puffed, 'you don't hear so well. You only catch half the lesson of the Teacher, the Master,' she laughed.

She was sneering at him now; she conveyed the impression that he was a charlatan. Yet Peggy had said that they were very intimate – she and this foreigner. The vision of the man at Eleanor's changed slightly like an air ball blown aside.

'I thought he was a friend of yours,' he said aloud.

'Nicholas?' she exclaimed. 'I love him!'

Her eyes certainly glowed. They fixed themselves upon a salt cellar with a look of rapture that made North feel once more puzzled.

'You love him . . .' he began. But here the telephone rang.

'There he is!' she exclaimed. 'That's him! That's Nicholas!'

She spoke with extreme irritation.

The telephone rang again. 'I'm not here!' she said. The telephone rang again. 'Not here! Not here! Not here!' she repeated in time to the bell. She made no attempt to answer it. He could stand the stab of her voice and the bell no longer. He went over to the telephone. There was a pause as he stood with the receiver in his hand.

'Tell him I'm not here!' she said.

'Hullo,' he said, answering the telephone. But there was a pause. He looked at her sitting on the edge of her chair, swinging her foot up and down. Then a voice spoke.

'I'm North,' he answered the telephone. 'I'm dining with Sara. . . . Yes, I'll tell her. . . .' He looked at her again. 'She is sitting on

the edge of her chair,' he said, 'with a smudge on her swinging her foot up and down.'

Eleanor stood holding the telephone. She smiled, and f moment after she had put the receiver back stood there, smiling, before she turned to her niece Peggy who had dining with her.

'North is dining with Sara,' she said, smiling at the little phone picture of two people at the other end of London, or whom was sitting on the edge of her chair with a smudge or face.

'He's dining with Sara,' she said again. But her niece did smile, for she had not seen the picture, and she was slig irritated because, in the middle of what they were say Eleanor suddenly got up and said, 'I'll just remind Sara.'

'Oh, is he?' she said casually.

Eleanor came and sat down.

'We were saying—' she began.

'You've had it cleaned,' said Peggy simultaneously. W Eleanor telephoned, she had been looking at the picture of grandmother over the writing-table.

'Yes,' Eleanor glanced back over her shoulder. 'Yes. Anc you see there's a flower fallen on the grass?' she said. She tu and looked at the picture. The face, the dress, the baske flowers all shone softly melting into each other, as if the p were one smooth coat of enamel. There was a flower – a l sprig of blue – lying in the grass.

'It was hidden by the dirt,' said Eleanor. 'But I can just member it, when I was a child. That reminds me, if you wa good man to clean pictures—'

'But was it like her?' Peggy interrupted.

Somebody had told her that she was like her grandmot and she did not want to be like her. She wanted to be dark aquiline: but in fact she was blue-eyed and round-faced – her grandmother.

'I've got the address somewhere,' Eleanor went on.

'Don't bother – don't bother,' said Peggy, irritated by aunt's habit of adding unnecessary details. It was age com on, she supposed: age that loosened screws and made the wh apparatus of the mind rattle and jingle.

'Was it like her?' she asked again.

'Not as I remember her,' said Eleanor, glancing once more at the picture. 'When I was a child perhaps – no, I don't think even as a child. What's so interesting,' she continued, 'is that what they thought ugly – red hair for instance – we think pretty; so that I often ask myself,' she paused, puffing at her cheroot, ' "What is pretty?" '

'Yes,' said Peggy. 'That's what we were saying.'

For when Eleanor suddenly took it into her head that she must remind Sara of the party, they had been talking about Eleanor's childhood – how things had changed; one thing seemed good to one generation, another to another. She liked getting Eleanor to talk about her past; it seemed to her so peaceful and so safe.

'Is there any standard, d'you think?' she said, wishing to bring her back to what they were saying.

'I wonder,' said Eleanor absentmindedly. She was thinking of something else.

'How annoying!' she exclaimed suddenly. 'I had it on the tip of my tongue – something I want to ask you. Then I thought of Delia's party: then North made me laugh – Sally sitting on the edge of her chair with a smudge on her nose; and that's put it out of my head.' She shook her head.

'D'you know the feeling when one's been on the point of saying something, and been interrupted; how it seems to stick *here*,' she tapped her forehead, 'so that it stops everything else? Not that it was anything of importance,' she added. She wandered about the room for a moment. 'No, I give it up; I give it up,' she said, shaking her head.

'I shall go and get ready now, if you'll call a cab.'

She went into the bedroom. Soon there was the sound of running water.

Peggy lit another cigarette. If Eleanor were going to wash, as seemed likely from the sounds in the bedroom, there was no need to hurry about the cab. She glanced at the letters on the mantelpiece. An address stuck out on the top of one of them – 'Mon Repos, Wimbledon.' One of Eleanor's dentists, Peggy thought to herself. The man she went botanizing with on Wimbledon Common perhaps. A charming man. Eleanor had described him. 'He says every tooth is quite unlike every other tooth. And he knows all about plants. . . .' It was difficult to get her to stick to her childhood.

She crossed to the telephone; she gave the number. There v a pause. As she waited she looked at her hands holding telephone. Efficient, shell-like, polished but not painted, they a compromise, she thought, looking at her finger-nails, betwe science and ... But here a voice said 'Number, please,' and s gave it.

Again she waited. As she sat where Eleanor had sat she s the telephone picture that Eleanor had seen – Sally sitting the edge of her chair with a smudge on her face. What a fo she thought bitterly, and a thrill ran down her thigh. Why v she bitter? For she prided herself upon being honest – she wa doctor – and that thrill she knew meant bitterness. Did she en her because she was happy, or was it the croak of some cestral prudery – did she disapprove of these friendships w men who did not love women? She looked at the picture of h grandmother as if to ask her opinion. But she had assumed t immunity of a work of art; she seemed as she sat there, smili at her roses, to be indifferent to our right and wrong.

'Hullo,' said a gruff voice, which suggested sawdust and shelter, and she gave the address and put down the telepho just as Eleanor came in – she was wearing a red-gold Arab clo with a silver veil over her hair.

'One of these days d'you think you'll be able to see things the end of the telephone?' Peggy said, getting up. Eleanor's h was her beauty, she thought; and her silver-washed dark eyes a fine old prophetess, a queer old bird, venerable and funny one and the same time. She was burnt from her travels so th her hair looked whiter than ever.

'What's that?' said Eleanor, for she had not caught her rema about the telephone. Peggy did not repeat it. They stood at t window waiting for the cab. They stood there side by sid silent, looking out, because there was a pause to fill up, and t view from the window, which was so high over the roofs, ov the squares and angles of back gardens to the blue line of hills the distance served, like another voice speaking, to fill up t pause. The sun was setting; one cloud lay curled like a r feather in the blue. She looked down. It was queer to see ca turning corners, going round this street and down the othe and not to hear the sound they made. It was like a map London; a section laid beneath them. The summer day w fading; lights were being lit, primrose lights, still separate, f

the glow of the sunset was still in the air. Eleanor pointed at the sky.

'That's where I saw my first aeroplane – there between those chimneys,' she said. There were high chimneys, factory chimneys, in the distance; and a great building – Westminster Cathedral was it? – over there riding above the roofs.

'I was standing here, looking out,' Eleanor went on. 'It must have been just after I'd got into the flat, a summer's day, and I saw a black spot in the sky, and I said to whoever it was – Miriam Parrish, I think, yes, for she came to help me to get into the flat – I hope Delia, by the way, remembered to ask her—' ... that's old age, Peggy noted, bringing in one thing after another.

'You said to Miriam—' she prompted her.

'I said to Miriam, "Is it a bird? No, I don't think it can be a bird. It's too big. Yet it moves." And suddenly it came over me, that's an aeroplane! And it was! You know they'd flown the Channel not so very long before. I was staying with you in Dorset at the time: and I remember reading it out in the paper, and someone – your father, I think – said: "The world will never be the same again!" '

'Oh, well—' Peggy laughed. She was about to say that aeroplanes hadn't made all that difference, for it was her line to disabuse her elders of their belief in science, partly because their credulity amused her, partly because she was daily impressed by the ignorance of doctors – when Eleanor sighed.

'Oh dear,' she murmured.

She turned away from the window.

Old age again, Peggy thought. Some gust blew open a door: one of the many millions in Eleanor's seventy-odd years; out came a painful thought; which she at once concealed – she had gone to her writing-table and was fidgeting with papers – with the humble generosity, the painful humility of the old.

'What, Nell—?' Peggy began.

'Nothing, nothing,' said Eleanor. She had seen the sky; and that sky was laid with pictures – she had seen it so often; any one of which might come uppermost when she looked at it. Now, because she had been talking to North, it brought back the war; how she had stood there one night, watching the searchlights. She had come home, after a raid; she had been dining in Westminster with Renny and Maggie. They had sat in a cellar;

and Nicholas – it was the first time she had met him – had s that the war was of no importance. 'We are children play with fireworks in the back garden' ... she remembered phrase; and how, sitting round a wooden packing-case, they l drunk to a new world. 'A new world – a new world!' Sally h cried, drumming with her spoon on top of the packing-case. S turned to her writing-table, tore up a letter and threw it away

'Yes,' she said, fumbling among her papers, looking for sor thing. 'Yes – I don't know about aeroplanes, I've never been in one; but motor cars – I could do without motor cars. I w almost knocked down by one, did I tell you? In the Brompt Road. All my own fault – I wasn't looking. ... And wireles that's a nuisance – the people downstairs turn it on after bre fast; but on the other hand – hot water; electric light; and the new—' She paused. 'Ah there it is!' she exclaimed. She pounc upon some paper that she had been hunting for. 'If Edwar there tonight, do remind me – I'll tie a knot in my handk chief....'

She opened her bag, took out a silk handkerchief, and p ceeded solemnly to tie it into a knot ... 'to ask him abo Runcorn's boy.'

The bell rang.

'The taxi,' she said.

She glanced about to make sure that she had forgott nothing. She stopped suddenly. Her eye had been caught by t evening paper, which lay on the floor with its broad bar of pri and its blurred photograph. She picked it up.

'What a face!' she exclaimed, flattening it out on the table.

As far as Peggy could see, but she was short-sighted, it was t usual evening paper's blurred picture of a fat man gesticulatin

'Damned—' Eleanor shot out suddenly, 'bully!' She tore t paper across with one sweep of her hand and flung it on t floor. Peggy was shocked. A little shiver ran over her skin as t paper tore. The word 'damned' on her aunt's lips had shock her.

Next moment she was amused; but still she had been shocke For when Eleanor, who used English so reticently, said 'damne and then 'bully', it meant much more than the words she a her friends used. And her gesture, tearing the paper ... What queer set they are, she thought, as she followed Eleanor dov the stairs. Her red-gold cloak trailed from step to step. So s

had seen her father rumple *The Times* and sit trembling with rage because somebody had said something in a newspaper. How odd!

And the way she tore it! she thought, half laughing, and she flung out her hand as Eleanor had flung hers. Eleanor's figure still seemed erect with indignation. It would be simple, she thought, it would be satisfactory, she thought, following her down flight after flight of stone steps, to be like that. The little knob on her cloak tapped on the stairs. They descended rather slowly.

'Take my aunt,' she said to herself, beginning to arrange the scene into an argument she had been having with a man at the hospital, 'take my aunt, living alone in a sort of workman's flat at the top of six flights of stairs . . .' Eleanor stopped.

'Don't tell me,' she said, 'that I left the letter upstairs – Runcorn's letter that I want to show Edward, about the boy?' She opened her bag. 'No: here it is.' There it was in her bag. They went on downstairs.

Eleanor gave the address to the cabman and sat down with a jerk in her corner. Peggy glanced at her out of the corner of her eye.

It was the force that she had put into the words that impressed her, not the words. It was as if she still believed with passion – she, old Eleanor – in the things that man had destroyed. A wonderful generation, she thought, as they drove off. Believers . . .

'You see,' Eleanor interrupted, as if she wanted to explain her words, 'it means the end of everything we cared for.'

'Freedom?' said Peggy perfunctorily.

'Yes,' said Eleanor. 'Freedom and justice.'

The cab drove off down the mild respectable little streets where every house had its bow window, its strip of garden, its private name. As they drove on, into the big main street, the scene in the flat composed itself in Peggy's mind as she would tell it to the man in the hospital. 'Suddenly she lost her temper,' she said, 'took the paper and tore it across – my aunt, who's over seventy.' She glanced at Eleanor to verify the details. Her aunt interrupted her.

'That's where we used to live,' she said. She waved her hand towards a long lamp-starred street on the left. Peggy, looking out, could just see the imposing unbroken avenue with its

succession of pale pillars and steps. The repeated columns, orderly architecture, had even a pale pompous beauty as stucco column repeated another stucco column all down street.

'Abercorn Terrace,' said Eleanor; '... the pillar-box,' she m mured as they drove past. Why the pillar-box? Peggy asked self. Another door had been opened. Old age must have endl avenues, stretching away and away down its darkness, she s posed, and now one door opened and then another.

'Aren't people—' Eleanor began. Then she stopped. As usu she had begun in the wrong place.

'Yes?' said Peggy. She was irritated by this inconsequence.

'I was going to say – the pillar-box made me think,' Elea began; then she laughed. She gave up the attempt to account the order in which her thoughts came to her. There was order, doubtless;but it took so long to find it, and this rambli she knew, annoyed Peggy, for young people's minds worked quickly.

'That's where we used to dine,' she broke off, nodding at a house at the corner of a square. 'Your father and I. The man used to read with. What was his name? He became a Judge. We used to dine there, the three of us. Morris, my father and ... They had very large parties in those days. Always le people. And he collected old oak. Mostly shams,' she added w a little chuckle.

'You used to dine ...' Peggy began. She wished to get her ba to her past. It was so interesting; so safe; so unreal – that past the eighties; and to her, so beautiful in its unreality.

'Tell me about your youth ...' she began.

'But your lives are much more interesting than ours we said Eleanor. Peggy was silent.

They were driving along a bright crowded street; here stain ruby with the light from picture palaces; here yellow from sh windows gay with summer dresses, for the shops, though sh were still lit up, and people were still looking at dresses, flights of hats on little rods, at jewels.

When my Aunt Delia comes to town, Peggy continued t story of Eleanor that she was telling her friend at the hospit she says, We must have a party. Then they all flock togeth They love it. As for herself, she hated it. She would far rath have stayed at home or gone to the pictures. It's the sense of t

family, she added, glancing at Eleanor as if to collect another little fact about her to add to her portrait of a Victorian spinster. Eleanor was looking out of the window. Then she turned.

'And the experiment with the guinea-pig – how did that go off?' she asked. Peggy was puzzled.

Then she remembered and told her.

'I see. So it proved nothing. So you've got to begin all over again. That's very interesting. Now I wish you'd explain to me ...' There was another problem that puzzled her.

The things she wants explained, Peggy said to her friend at the Hospital, are either as simple as two and two make four, or so difficult that nobody in the world knows the answer. And if you say to her, 'What's eight times eight?' – she smiled at the profile of her aunt against the window – she taps her forehead and says ... but again Eleanor interrupted her.

'It's so good of you to come,' she said, giving her a little pat on the knee. (But did I show her, Peggy thought, that I hate coming?)

'It's a way of seeing people,' Eleanor continued. 'And now that we're all getting on – not you, us – one doesn't like to miss chances.'

They drove on. And how does one get *that* right? Peggy thought, trying to add another touch to the portrait. 'Sentimental' was it? Or, on the contrary, was it good to feel like that ... natural ... right? She shook her head. I'm no use at describing people, she said to her friend at the Hospital. They're too difficult. ... She's not like that – not like that at all, she said, making a little dash with her hand as if to rub out an outline that she had drawn wrongly. As she did so, her friend at the Hospital vanished.

She was alone with Eleanor in the cab. And they were passing houses. Where does she begin, and where do I end? she thought. ... On they drove. They were two living people, driving across London; two sparks of life enclosed in two separate bodies; and those sparks of life enclosed in two separate bodies are at this moment, she thought, driving past a picture palace. But what is this moment; and what are we? The puzzle was too difficult for her to solve it. She sighed.

'You're too young to feel that,' said Eleanor.

'What?' Peggy asked with a little start.

'About meeting people. About not missing chances of se them.'

'Young?' said Peggy. 'I shall never be as young as you are!' patted her Aunt's knee in her turn. 'Gallivanting off to India she laughed.

'Oh, India. India's nothing nowadays,' said Eleanor. 'Trav so easy. You just take a ticket; just get on board ship. ... what I want to see before I die,' she continued, 'is someth different....' She waved her hand out of the window. T were passing public buildings; offices of some sort. '... anot kind of civilization. Tibet, for instance. I was reading a book a man called – now what was he called?'

She paused, distracted by the sights in the street. 'D people wear pretty clothes nowadays?' she said, pointing t girl with fair hair and a young man in evening dress.

'Yes,' said Peggy perfunctorily, looking at the painted f and the bright shawl; at the white waistcoat and the smoot back hair. Anything distracts Eleanor, everything interests l she thought.

'Was it that you were suppressed when you were young?' said aloud, recalling vaguely some childish memory; her gra father with the shiny stumps instead of fingers; and a long d drawing-room. Eleanor turned. She was surprised.

'Suppressed?' she repeated. She so seldom thought about l self now that she was surprised.

'Oh, I see what you mean,' she added after a moment. A ture – another picture – had swum to the surface. There Delia standing in the middle of the room; Oh my God! Oh God! she was saying; a hansom cab had stopped at the ho next door; and she herself was watching Morris – was it Mor – going down the street to post a letter. ... She was silent. I not want to go back into my past, she was thinking. I want present.

'Where's he taking us?' she said, looking out. They l reached the public part of London; the illuminated. The li fell on broad pavements; on white brilliantly lit-up pul offices; on a pallid, hoary-looking church. Advertiseme popped in and out. Here was a bottle of beer: it poured: tl stopped: then poured again. They had reached the theatre qu ter. There was the usual garish confusion. Men and women evening dress were walking in the middle of the road. Cabs w

wheeling and stopping. Their own taxi was held up. It stopped dead under a statue: the lights shone on its cadaverous pallor.

'Always reminds me of an advertisement of sanitary towels,' said Peggy, glancing at the figure of a woman in nurse's uniform holding out her hand.

Eleanor was shocked for a moment. A knife seemed to slice her skin, leaving a ripple of unpleasant sensation; but what was solid in her body it did not touch, she realized after a moment. That she said because of Charles, she thought, feeling the bitterness in her tone – her brother, a nice dull boy who had been killed.

'The only fine thing that was said in the war,' she said aloud, reading the words cut on the pedestal.

'It didn't come to much,' said Peggy sharply.

The cab remained fixed in the block.

The pause seemed to hold them in the light of some thought that they both wished to put away.

'Don't people wear pretty clothes nowadays?' said Eleanor, pointing to another girl with fair hair in a long bright cloak and another young man in evening dress.

'Yes,' said Peggy briefly.

But why don't you enjoy yourself more? Eleanor said to herself. Her brother's death had been very sad, but she had always found North much the more interesting of the two. The cab threaded its way through the traffic and passed into a back street. He was stopped now by a red light. 'It's nice, having North back again,' Eleanor said.

'Yes,' said Peggy. 'He says we talk of nothing but money and politics,' she added. She finds fault with him because he was not the one to be killed; but that's wrong, Eleanor thought.

'Does he?' she said. 'But then . . .' A newspaper placard, with large black letters, seemed to finish her sentence for her. They were approaching the square in which Delia lived. She began to fumble with her purse. She looked at the metre which had mounted rather high. The man was going the long way round.

'He'll find his way in time,' she said. They were gliding slowly round the square. She waited patiently, holding her purse in her hand. She saw a breadth of dark sky over the roofs. The sun had sunk. For a moment the sky had the quiet look of the sky that lies above the fields and woods in the country.

'He'll have to turn, that's all,' she said. 'I'm not desponde she added, as the taxi turned. 'Travelling, you see: when one to mix up with all sorts of other people on board ship, or in of those little places where one has to stay – off the bea track—' The taxi was sliding tentatively past house after hous 'You ought to go there, Peggy,' she broke off; 'you ought travel: the natives are so beautiful you know; half naked: go down to the river in the moonlight; – that's the house o there—' She tapped on the window – the taxi slowed dov 'What was I saying? I'm not despondent, no, because people so kind, so good at heart. . . . So that if only ordinary peop ordinary people like ourselves . . .'

The cab drew up at a house whose windows were lit Peggy leant forward and opened the door. She jumped out a paid the driver. Eleanor bundled out after her. 'No, no, Peggy,' she began.

'It's my cab, It's my cab,' Peggy protested.

'But I insist on paying my share,' said Eleanor, opening purse.

'That's Eleanor,' said North. He left the telephone and turn to Sara. She was still swinging her foot up and down.

'She told me to tell you to come to Delia's party,' he said.

'To Delia's party? Why to Delia's party?' she asked.

'Because they're old and want you to come,' he said, standi over her.

'Old Eleanor; wandering Eleanor; Eleanor with the w eyes . . .' she mused. 'Shall I, shan't I, shall I, shan't I?' s hummed, looking up at him. 'No,' she said, putting her feet the ground, 'I shan't.'

'You must,' he said. For her manner irritated him – Eleano voice was still in his ears.

'I must, must I?' she said, making the coffee.

'Then,' she said, giving him his cup and picking up the book the same time, 'read until we must go.'

She curled herself up again, holding her cup in her hand.

It was still early, it was true. But why, he thought as opened the book again and turned over the pages, won't s come? Is she afraid? he wondered. He looked at her crumpled her chair. Her dress was shabby. He looked at the book aga but he could hardly see to read. She had not lit the lamp.

'I can't see to read without a light,' he said. It grew dark soon in this street; the houses were so close. Now a car passed and a light slid across the ceiling.

'Shall I turn on the light?' she asked.

'No,' he said. 'I'll try to remember something.' He began to say aloud the only poem he knew by heart. As he spoke the words out into the semi-darkness they sounded extremely beautiful, he thought, because they could not see each other, perhaps.

He paused at the end of the verse.

'Go on,' she said.

He began again. The words going out into the room seemed like actual presences, hard and independent; yet as she was listening they were changed by their contact with her. But as he reached the end of the second verse—

Society is all but rude—
To this delicious solitude . . .

he heard a sound. Was it in the poem or outside of it, he wondered? Inside, he thought, and was about to go on, when she raised her hand. He stopped. He heard heavy footsteps outside the door. Was someone coming in? Her eyes were on the door.

'The Jew,' she murmured.

'The Jew?' he said. They listened. He could hear quite distinctly now. Somebody was turning on taps; somebody was having a bath in the room opposite.

'The Jew having a bath,' she said.

'The Jew having a bath?' he repeated.

'And tomorrow there'll be a line of grease round the bath,' she said.

'Damn the Jew!' he exclaimed. The thought of a line of grease from a strange man's body on the bath next door disgusted him.

'Go on—' said Sara: 'Society is all but rude,' she repeated the last lines, 'to this delicious solitude.'

'No,' he said.

They listened to the water running. The man was coughing and clearing his throat as he sponged.

'Who is this Jew?' he asked.

'Abrahamson, in the tallow trade,' she said.

They listened.

'Engaged to a pretty girl in a tailor's shop,' she added.

They could hear the sounds through the thin walls very tinctly.

He was snorting as he sponged himself.

'But he leaves hairs in the bath,' she concluded.

North felt a shiver run through him. Hairs in food, hairs basins, other people's hairs made him feel physically sick.

'D'you share a bath with him?' he asked.

She nodded.

He made a noise like 'Pah!'

' "Pah." That's what I said,' she laughed. ' "Pah!" – whe went into the bathroom on a cold winter's morning – "Pah she threw her hand out – ' "Pah!" 'She paused.

'And then—?' he asked.

'And then,' she said, sipping her coffee, 'I came back into sitting-room. And breakfast was waiting. Fried eggs and a bi toast. Lydia with her blouse torn and her hair down. The un ployed singing hymns under the window. And I said to mysel she flung her hand out, ' "Polluted city, unbelieving city, of dead fish and worn-out frying-pans" – thinking of a riv bank, when the tide's out,' she explained.

'Go on,' he nodded.

'So I put on my hat and coat and rushed out in a rage,' continued, 'and stood on the bridge, and said, "Am I a we carried this way, that way, on a tide that comes twice a without a meaning?" '

'Yes?' he prompted her.

'And there were people passing; the strutting; the tiptoei the pasty; the ferret-eyed; the bowler-hatted, servile innum able army of workers. And I said, "Must I join your conspira Stain the hand, the unstained hand," ' – he could see her ha gleam as she waved it in the half-light of the sitting-roo ' "—and sign on, and serve a master; all because of a Jew in bath, all because of a Jew?" '

She sat up and laughed, excited by the sound of her o voice which had run in to a jog-trot rhythm.

'Go on, go on,' he said.

'But I had a talisman, a glowing gem, a lucent emerald' – picked up an envelope that lay on the floor – 'a letter of int duction. And I said to the flunkey in peach-blossom trouse "Admit me, sirrah," and he led me along corridors pi with purple till I came to a door, a mahogany door, a

nocked; and a voice said, "Enter." And what did I find?' She aused. 'A stout man with red cheeks. On his table three orchids n a vase. Pressed into your hand, I thought, as the car crunches he gravel by your wife at parting. And over the fireplace the isual picture—'

'Stop!' North interrupted her. 'You have come to an office,' he apped the table. 'You are presenting a letter of introduction – out to whom?'

'Oh, to whom?' she laughed. 'To a man in sponge-bag trousers. 'I knew your father at Oxford," he said, toying with the blot-ing-paper, ornamented in one corner with a cartwheel. But vhat do *you* find insoluble, I asked him, looking at the mahog-iny man, the clean-shaven, rosy-gilled, mutton-fed man—'

'The man in a newspaper office,' North checked her, 'who new your father. And then?'

'There was a humming and a grinding. The great machines vent round; and little boys popped in with elongated sheets; lack sheets; smudged; damp with printer's ink. "Pardon me a noment," he said, and made a note in the margin. But the Jew's n my bath, I said – the Jew ... the Jew....' She stopped sud-lenly and emptied her glass.

Yes, he thought, there's the voice; there's the attitude; and he reflection in other people's faces; but then there's something rue – in the silence perhaps. But it was not silent. They could iear the Jew thudding in the bathroom; he seemed to stagger rom foot to foot as he dried himself. Now he unlocked the loor, and they heard him go upstairs. The pipes began to give orth hollow gurgling sounds.

'How much of that was true?' he asked her. But she had apsed into silence. The actual words he supposed – the actual vords floated together and formed a sentence in his mind – neant that she was poor; that she must earn her living, but the excitement with which she had spoken, due to wine perhaps, had created yet another person; another semblance, which one must solidify into one whole.

The house was quiet now, save for the sound of the bath water running away. A watery pattern fluctuated on the ceil-ing. The street lamps jiggering up and down outside made the houses opposite a curious pale red. The uproar of the day had died away; no carts were rattling down the street. The veg-etable-sellers, the organ-grinders, the woman practising her

scales, the man playing the trombone, had all trundled a their barrows, pulled down their shutters, and closed the li their pianos. It was so still that for a moment North though was in Africa, sitting on the verandah in the moonlight; he roused himself. 'What about this party?' he said. He go and threw away his cigarette. He stretched himself and loo at his watch. 'It's time to go,' he said. 'Go and get ready, urged her. For if one went to a party, he thought, it was abs to go just as people were leaving. And the party must l begun.

'What were you saying – what were you saying, Nell?' Peggy, in order to distract Eleanor from paying her share of cab, as they stood on the doorstep. 'Ordinary people – ordin people ought to do what?' she asked.

Eleanor was still fumbling with her purse and did not answ

'No, I can't allow that,' she said. 'Here, take this—'

But Peggy brushed aside the hand, and the coins rolled on door-step. They both stooped simultaneously and their he collided.

'Don't bother,' said Eleanor as a coin rolled away. 'It was my fault.' The maid was holding the door open.

'And where do we take our cloaks off?' she said. 'In here?'

They went into a room on the ground floor which, though office, had been arranged so that it could be used as a cl room. There was a looking-glass on the table: and in front o trays of pins and combs and brushes. She went up to the g and gave herself one brief glance.

'What a gipsy I look!' she said, and ran a comb through hair. 'Burnt as brown as a nigger!' Then she gave way to Pe and waited.

'I wonder if this was the room . . .' she said.

'What room?' said Peggy abstractedly: she was attending her face.

'. . . where we used to meet,' said Eleanor. She looked ab her. It was still used as an office apparently; but now there w house-agents' placards on the wall.

'I wonder if Kitty'll come tonight,' she mused.

Peggy was gazing into the glass and did not answer.

'She doesn't often come to town now. Only for weddings a christenings and so on,' Eleanor continued.

Peggy was drawing a line with a tube of some sort round her ips.

'Suddenly you meet a young man six-foot-two and you realize his is the baby,' Eleanor went on.

Peggy was still absorbed in her face.

'D'you have to do that fresh every time?' said Eleanor.

'I should look a fright if I didn't,' said Peggy. The tightness ound her lips and eyes seemed to her visible. She had never felt ess in the mood for a party.

'Oh, how kind of you . . .' Eleanor broke off. The maid had rought in a sixpence.

'Now, Peggy,' said she, proffering the coin, 'let me pay my hare.'

'Don't be an ass,' said Peggy, brushing away her hand.

'But it was my cab,' Eleanor insisted. Peggy walked on. 'Be-cause I hate going to parties,' Eleanor continued, following her, till holding out the coin, 'on the cheap. You don't remember your grandfather? He always said, "Don't spoil a good ship for a a'porth of tar." If you went shopping with him,' she went on s they began mounting the stairs, ' "Show me the very best hing you've got," he'd say.'

'I remember him,' said Peggy.

'Do you?' said Eleanor. She was pleased that anyone should emember her father. 'They've let these rooms, I suppose,' she dded as they walked upstairs. Doors were open. 'That's a soli-citor's,' she said, looking at some deed-boxes with white names ainted on them.

'Yes, I see what you mean about painting – making-up,' she continued, glancing at her niece. 'You do look nice. You look lit-up. I like it on young people. Not for myself. I should feel bed-zened – bedizzened? – how d'you pronounce it? And what am I o do with these coppers if you won't take them? I ought to ave left them in my bag downstairs.' They mounted higher and igher. 'I suppose they've opened all these rooms,' she con-tinued – they had now reached a strip of red carpet – 'so that if Delia's little room gets too full – but of course the party's hardly begun yet. We're early. Everybody's upstairs. I hear them talk-ing. Come along. Shall I go first?'

A babble of voices sounded behind a door. A maid intercepted hem.

'Miss Pargiter,' said Eleanor.

'Miss Pargiter!' the maid called out, opening the door.

'Go and get ready,' said North. He crossed the room
fumbled with the switch.

He touched the switch, and the electric light in the midd
the room came on. The shade had been taken off, and a co
greenish paper had been twisted round it.

'Go and get ready,' he repeated. Sara did not answer. Sh
pulled a book towards her and pretended to read it.

'He's killed the king,' she said. 'So what'll he do next?
held her finger between the pages of the book and looked
him; a device, he knew, to put off the moment of action. H
not want to go either. Still, if Eleanor wanted them to go
hesitated, looking at his watch.

'What'll he do next?' she repeated.

'Comedy,' he said briefly, 'Contrast,' he said, rememb
something he had read. 'The only form of continuity,' he a
at a venture.

'Well, go on reading,' she said, handing him the book.

He opened it at random.

'The scene is a rocky island in the middle of the sea,' he
He paused.

Always before reading he had to arrange the scene; to let
sink; that come forward. A rocky island in the middle of
sea, he said to himself – there were green pools, tufts of s
grass, sand, and far away the soft sigh of waves breaking
opened his mouth to read. Then there was a sound behind
a presence – in the play or in the room? He looked up.

'Maggie!' Sara exclaimed. There she was standing at the
door in evening dress.

'Were you asleep?' she said, coming into the room. 'W
been ringing and ringing.'

She stood smiling at them, amused, as if she had wak
sleepers.

'Why d'you trouble to have a bell when it's always brok
said a man who stood behind her.

North rose. At first he scarcely remembered them. The
face sight was strange on top of his memory of them, as he
seen them years ago.

'The bells don't ring, and the taps don't run,' he said, a

wardly. 'Or they don't stop running,' he added, for the bath water was still gurgling in the pipes.

'Luckily the door was open,' said Maggie. She stood at the table looking at the broken apple peel and the dish of fly-blown fruit. Some beauty, North thought, withers; some, he looked at her, grows more beautiful with age. Her hair was grey; her children must be grown up now, he supposed. But why do women purse their lips up when they look in the glass? he wondered. She was looking in the glass. She was pursing her lips. Then she crossed the room, and sat down in the chair by the fireplace.

'And why has Renny been crying?' said Sara. North looked at him. There were wet marks on either side of his large nose.

'Because we've been to a very bad play,' he said, 'and should like something to drink,' he added.

Sara went to the cupboard and began clinking glasses. 'Were you reading?' said Renny, looking at the book which had fallen on the floor.

'We were on a rocky island in the middle of the sea,' said Sara, putting the glasses on the table. Renny began to pour out whisky.

Now I remember him, North thought. Last time they had met was before he went to the war. It was in a little house in Westminster. They had sat in front of the fire. And a child had played with a spotted horse. And he had envied them their happiness. And they had talked about science. And Renny had said, 'I help them to make shells,' and a mask had come down over his face. A man who made shells; a man who loved peace; a man of science; a man who cried. . . .

'Stop!' cried Renny. 'Stop!' Sara had spurted the soda water over the table.

'When did you get back?' Renny asked him, taking his glass and looking at him with eyes still wet with tears.

'About a week ago,' he said.

'You've sold your farm?' said Renny. He sat down with his glass in his hand.

'Yes, sold it,' said North. 'Whether I shall stay, or go back,' he said, taking his glass and raising it to his lips, 'I don't know.'

'Where was your farm?' said Renny, bending towards him. And they talked about Africa.

Maggie looked at them drinking and talking. The twisted c of paper over the electric light was oddly stained. The mo light made their faces look greenish. The two grooves on e side of Renny's nose were still wet. His face was all peaks hollows; North's face was round and snub-nosed and ra blueish about the lips. She gave her chair a little push so that got the two heads in relation side by side. They were v different. And as they talked about Africa their faces chan as if some twitch had been given to the fine network under skin and the weights fell into different sockets. A thrill through her as if the weights in her own body had changed But there was something about the light that puzzled her. looked round. A lamp must be flaring in the street outside. light, flickering up and down, mixed with the electric l under the greenish cone of mottled paper. It was that which. She started; a voice had reached her.

'To Africa?' she said, looking at North.

'To Delia's party,' he said. 'I asked if you were coming. She had not been listening.

'One moment . . .' Renny interrupted. He held up his hand a policeman stopping traffic. And again they went on, talk about Africa.

Maggie lay back in her chair. Behind their heads rose curve of the mahogany chair back. And behind the curve the chair back was a crinkled glass with a red lip; then th was the straight line of the mantelpiece with little black-a white squares on it; and then three rods ending in soft yell plumes. She ran her eye from thing to thing. In and ou went, collecting, gathering, summing up into one whole, wh just as she was about to complete the pattern, Renny claimed:

'We must – we must!'

He had got up. He had pushed away his glass of whisky. stood there like somebody commanding a troop, No thought; so emphatic was his voice, so commanding his gestu Yet it was only a question of going round to an old woma party. Or was there always, he thought, as he too rose a looked for his hat, something that came to the surface, in propriately, unexpectedly, from the depths of people, and m ordinary actions, ordinary words, expressive of the wh being, so that he felt, as he turned to follow Renny to Del

party, as if he were riding to the relief of a besieged garrison across a desert?

He stopped with his hand on the door. Sara had come in from the bedroom. She had changed; she was in evening dress; there was something odd about her – perhaps it was the effect of the evening dress estranging her?

'I am ready,' she said, looking at them.

She stooped and picked up the book that North had let fall.

'We must go—' she said, turning to her sister.

She put the book on the table; she gave it a sad little pat as she shut it.

'We must go,' she repeated, and followed them down the stairs.

Maggie rose. She gave one more look at the cheap lodging-house room. There was the pampas grass in its terra-cotta pot; the green vase with the crinkled lip; and the mahogany chair. On the dinner table lay the dish of fruit; the heavy sensual apples lay side by side with the yellow spotted bananas. It was an odd combination – the round and the tapering, the rosy and the yellow. She switched off the light. The room now was almost dark, save for a watery pattern fluctuating on the ceiling. In this phantom evanescent light only the outlines showed; ghostly apples, ghostly bananas, and the spectre of a chair. Colour was slowly returning, as her eyes grew used to the darkness, and substance. . . . She stood there for a moment looking. Then a voice shouted:

'Maggie! Maggie!'

'I'm coming!' she cried, and followed them down the stairs.

'And your name, miss?' said the maid to Peggy as she hung back behind Eleanor.

'Miss Margaret Pargiter,' said Peggy.

'Miss Margaret Pargiter!' the maid called out into the room.

There was a babble of voices; lights opened brightly in front of her, and Delia came forward. 'Oh, Peggy!' she exclaimed. 'How nice of you to come!'

She went in; but she felt plated, coated over with some cold skin. They had come too early – the room was almost empty. Only a few people stood about, talking too loudly, as if to fill the room. Making believe, Peggy thought to herself as she shook hands with Delia and passed on, that something pleasant is

about to happen. She saw with extreme clearness the Per rug and the carved fireplace, but there was an empty spac the middle of the room.

What is the tip for this particular situation? she asked her as if she were prescribing for a patient. Take notes, she ad Do them up in a bottle with a glossy green cover, she thou Take notes and the pain goes. Take notes and the pain goes, repeated to herself as she stood there alone. Delia hurried her. She was talking, but talking at random.

'It's all very well for you people who live in London—' was saying. But the nuisance of taking notes of what people Peggy went on as Delia passed her, is that they talk such sense . . . such complete nonsense, she thought, drawing her back against the wall. Here her father came in. He paused at door; put his head up as if he were looking for someone, advanced with his hand out.

And what's this? she asked, for the sight of her father in rather worn shoes had given her a direct spontaneous feel This sudden warm spurt? she asked, examining it. She watc him cross the room. His shoes always affected her strang Part sex; part pity, she thought. Can one call it 'love'? But forced herself to move. Now that I have drugged myself in state of comparative insensibility, she said to herself, I will w across the room boldly; I will go to Uncle Patrick, who is sta ing by the sofa picking his teeth, and I will say to him – w shall I say?

A sentence suggested itself for no rhyme or reason as crossed the room: 'How's the man who cut his toes off with hatchet?'

'How's the man who cut his toes off with the hatchet?' said, speaking the words exactly as she thought them. The ha some old Irishman bent down, for he was very tall, and lowed his hand, for he was hard of hearing.

'Hacket? Hacket?' he repeated. She smiled. The steps fr brain to brain must be cut very shallow, if thought is to mo them, she noted.

'Cut his toes off with the hatchet when I was staying w you,' she said. She remembered how when she last stayed w them in Ireland the gardener had cut his foot with a hatchet.

'Hacket? Hacket?' he repeated. He looked puzzled. Th understanding dawned.

'Oh, the Hackets!' he said. 'Dear old Peter Hacket – yes.' It eemed that there were Hackets in Galway, and the mistake, vhich she did not trouble to explain, was all to the good, for it et him off, and he told her stories about the Hackets as they sat ide by side on the sofa.

A grown woman, she thought, crosses London to talk to a leaf old man about the Hackets, whom she's never heard of, vhen she meant to ask after the gardener who cut his toe off vith a hatchet. But does it matter? Hackets or hatchets? She aughed, happily in time with a joke, so that it seemed appropri-te. But one wants somebody to laugh with, she thought. 'leasure is increased by sharing it. Does the same hold good of ain? she mused. Is that the reason why we all talk so much of ll-health – because sharing things lessens things? Give pain, give leasure an outer body, and by increasing the surface diminish hem. . . . But the thought slipped. He was off telling his old tories. Gently, methodically, like a man setting in motion some till serviceable but rather weary nag, he was off remembering ld days, old dogs, old memories that slowly shaped themselves, is he warmed, into little figures of country house life. She fan-ied as she half listened that she was looking at a faded snapshot of cricketers; of shooting parties on the many steps of some ountry mansion.

How many people, she wondered, listen? This 'sharing', then, s a bit of a farce. She made herself attend.

'Ah yes, those were fine old days!' he was saying. The light ame into his faded eyes.

She looked once more at the snapshot of the men in gaiters, nd the women in flowing skirts on the broad white steps with he dogs curled up at their feet. But he was off again.

'Did you ever hear from your father of a man called Roddy enkins who lived in the little white house on the right-hand ide as you go along the road?' he asked. 'But you must know hat story?' he added.

'No,' she said, screwing up her eyes as if she referred to the iles of memory. 'Tell me.'

And he told her the story.

I'm good, she thought, at fact-collecting. But what makes up a erson—, (she hollowed her hand), the circumference, – no, I'm ot good at that. There was her Aunt Delia. She watched her noving quickly about the room. What do I know about her?

That she's wearing a dress with gold spots; has wavy hair was red, is white; is handsome; ravaged; with a past. But past? She married Patrick. ... The long story that Patrick telling her kept breaking up the surface of her mind like dipping into water. Nothing could settle. There was a lake i story too, for it was a story about duck-shooting.

She married Patrick, she thought, looking at his bat weather-worn face with the single hairs on it. Why did marry Patrick? she wondered. How do they manage it – childbirth? The people who touch each other and go up cloud of smoke: red smoke? His face reminded her of th skin of a gooseberry with the little stray hairs. But none o lines on his face was sharp enough, she thought, to explain they came together and had three children. They were lines came from shooting; lines that came from worry; for th days were over, he was saying. They had to cut things dow

'Yes, we're all finding that,' she said perfunctorily. She tu her wrist cautiously so that she could read her watch. Fi minutes only had passed. But the room was filling with pe she did not know. There was an Indian in a pink turban.

'Ah, but I'm boring you with these old stories,' said her u wagging his head. He was hurt, she felt.

'No, no, no!' she said, feeling uncomfortable. He was again, but out of good manners this time, she felt. Pain outbalance pleasure by two parts to one, she thought; i social relations. Or am I the exception, the peculiar person continued, for the others seemed happy enough. Yes, thought, looking straight ahead of her, and feeling again stretched skin round her lips and eyes tight from the tired of sitting up late with a woman in childbirth, I'm the excpe hard; cold; in a groove already; merely a doctor.

Getting out of grooves is damned unpleasant, she thou before the chill of death has set in, like bending frozen boots She bent her head to listen. To smile, to bend, to make be you're amused when you're bored, how painful it is, thought. All ways, every way's painful, she thought; starin the Indian in the pink turban.

'Who's that fellow?' Patrick asked, nodding his head in direction.

'One of Eleanor's Indians I expect,' she said aloud, thought, If only the merciful powers of darkness would o

erate the external exposure of the sensitive nerve and I could get up and. . . . There was a pause.

'But I mustn't keep you here, listening to my old stories,' said Uncle Patrick. His weather-beaten nag with the broken knees had stopped.

'But tell me, does old Biddy still keep the little shop,' she asked, 'where we used to buy sweets?'

'Poor old body—' he began. He was off again. All her patients said that, she thought. Rest – rest – let me rest. How to deaden; how to cease to feel; that was the cry of the woman bearing children; to rest, to cease to be. In the Middle Ages, she thought, it was the cell; the monastery; now it's the laboratory; the professions; not to live; not to feel; to make money, always money, and in the end, when I'm old and worn like a horse, no, it's a cow . . . – for part of old Patrick's story had imposed itself upon her mind: '. . . for there's no sale for the beasts at all,' he was saying, 'no sale at all. Ah, there's Julia Cromarty—' he exclaimed, and waved his hand, his large loose-jointed hand, at a charming compatriot.

She was left sitting alone on the sofa. For her uncle rose and went off with both hands outstretched to greet the bird-like old woman who had come in chattering.

She was left alone. She was glad to be alone. She had no wish to talk. But next moment somebody stood beside her. It was Martin. He sat down beside her. She changed her attitude completely.

'Hullo, Martin!' she greeted him cordially.

'Done your duty by the old mare, Peggy?' he said. He referred to the stories that old Patrick always told them.

'Did I look very glum?' she asked.

'Well,' he said, glancing at her, 'not exactly enraptured.'

'One knows the end of his stories by now,' she excused herself, looking at Martin. He had taken to brushing his hair up like a waiter's. He never looked her fully in the face. He never felt entirely at his ease with her. She was his doctor; she knew that he dreaded cancer. She must try to distract him from thinking, Does she see any symptoms?

'I was wondering how they came to marry,' she said. 'Were they in love?' She spoke at random to distract him.

'Of course he was in love,' he said. He looked at Delia. She was standing by the fireplace talking to the Indian. She was still

a very handsome woman, with her presence, with gestures.

'We were all in love,' he said, glancing sideways at Peggy younger generation were so serious.

'Oh, of course,' she said, smiling. She liked his eternal pu of one love after another love – his gallant clutch upon flying tail, the slippery tail of youth – even he, even now.

'But you,' he said, stretching his feet out, hitching up trousers, 'your generation I mean – you miss a great deal . . . miss a great deal,' he repeated. She waited.

'Loving only your own sex,' he added.

He liked to assert his own youth in that way, she though say things that he thought up to date.

'I'm not that generation,' she said.

'Well, well, well,' he chuckled, shrugging his shoulder glancing at her sideways. He knew very little about her pri life. But she looked serious; she looked tired. She works hard, he thought.

'I'm getting on,' said Peggy. 'Getting into a groove. So Ele told me tonight.'

Or was it she, on the other hand, who had told Eleanor was 'suppressed'? One or the other.

'Eleanor's a gay old dog,' he said. 'Look!' He pointed.

There she was, talking to the Indian in her red cloak.

'Just back from India,' he added. 'A present from Bengal, he said, referring to the cloak.

'And next year she's off to China,' said Peggy.

'But Delia—' she asked; Delia was passing them. 'Was sh love?' (What you in your generation called 'in love', she ad to herself.)

He wagged his head from side to side and pursed his lips. always liked his little joke, she remembered.

'I don't know – I don't know about Delia,' he said. 'There the cause, you know – what she called in those days The Cau He screwed his face up. 'Ireland, you know. Parnell. E heard of a man called Parnell?' he asked.

'Yes,' said Peggy.

'And Edward?' she added. He had come in; he looked v distinguished, too, in his elaborate, if conscious simplicity.

'Edward – yes,' said Martin. 'Edward was in love. Surely y know that old story – Edward and Kitty?'

'The one who married – what was his name? – Lasswade?' 'eggy murmured as Edward passed them.

'Yes, she married the other man – Lasswade. But he was in ove – he was very much in love,' Martin murmured. 'But you,' e gave her a quick little glance. There was something in her hat chilled him. 'Of course, you have your profession,' he dded. He looked at the ground. He was thinking of his dread of ancer, she supposed. He was afraid that she had noted some ymptom.

'Oh, doctors are great humbugs,' she threw out at random.

'Why? People live longer than they used, don't they?' he said. They don't die so painfully anyhow,' he added.

'We've learnt a few little tricks,' she conceded. He stared head of him with a look that moved her pity.

'You'll live to be eighty – if you want to live to be eighty,' she aid. He looked at her.

'Of course I'm all in favour of living to be eighty!' he exclaimed. 'I want to go to America. I want to see their buildings. 'm on that side, you see. I enjoy life.' He did, enormously.

He must be over sixty himself, she supposed. But he was wonlerfully got up; as sprig and spruce as a man of forty, with his anary-coloured lady in Kensington.

'I don't know,' she said aloud.

'Come, Peggy, come,' he said. 'Don't tell me you don't enjoy – iere's Rose.'

Rose came up. She had grown very stout.

'Don't you want to be eighty?' he said to her. He had to say it wice over. She was deaf.

'I do. Of course I do!' she said when she understood him. She aced them. She made an odd angle with her head thrown back, 'eggy thought, as if she were a military man.

'Of course I do,' she said, sitting down abruptly on the sofa eside them.

'Ah, but then—' Peggy began. She paused. Rose was deaf, she emembered. She had to shout. 'People hadn't made such fools of themselves in your day,' she shouted. But she doubted if Rose ieard.

'I want to see what's going to happen,' said Rose. 'We live in a ery interesting world,' she added.

'Nonsense,' Martin teased her. 'You want to live,' he bawled n her ear, 'because you enjoy living.'

'And I'm not ashamed of it,' she said. 'I like my kind –
whole.'

'What you like is fighting them,' he bawled.

'D'you think you can get a rise out of me at this time c
she said, tapping him on the arm.

Now they'll talk about being children; climbing trees
back garden, thought Peggy, and how they shot some
cats. Each person had a certain line laid down in their
she thought, and along it came the same old sayings. One'
must be criss-crossed like the palm of one's hand, she th
looking at the palm of her hand.

'She always was a spitfire,' said Martin, turning to Pegg

'And they always put the blame on me,' Rose said. 'F
the schoolroom. Where was I to sit? "Oh, run away and p
the nursery!"' she waved her hand.

'And so she went into the bathroom and cut her wrist
knife,' Martin jeered.

'No, that was Erridge: that was about the microscop
corrected him.

It's like a kitten catching its tail, Peggy thought: rour
round they go in a circle. But it's what they enjoy, she th
it's what they come to parties for. Martin went on teasing

'And where's your red ribbon?' he was asking.

Some decoration had been given her, Peggy remember
her work in the war.

'Aren't we worthy to see you in your war paint?' he
her.

'This fellow's jealous,' she said, turning to Peggy again
never done a stroke of work in his life.'

'I work – I work,' Martin insisted. 'I sit in an office a
long—'

'Doing what?' said Rose.

Then they became suddenly silent. That turn was over
old-brother-and-sister turn. Now they could only go bac
repeat the same thing over again.

'Look here,' said Martin, 'we must go and do our dut
rose. They parted.

'Doing what?' Peggy repeated, as she crossed the room. '
what?' she repeated. She was feeling reckless; nothing th
did mattered. She walked to the window and twitched th

ain apart. There were the stars pricked in little holes in the lue-black sky. There was a row of chimney-pots against the ky. Then the stars. Inscrutable, eternal, indifferent – those were he words; the right words. But I don't feel it, she said, looking t the stars. So why pretend to? What they're really like, she hought, screwing up her eyes to look at them, is little bits of rosty steel. And the moon – there it was – is a polished dish-cover. But she felt nothing, even when she had reduced moon nd stars to that. Then she turned and found herself face to face vith a young man she thought she knew but could not put a ame to. He had a fine brow, but a receding chin and he was ale, pasty.

'How-d'you-do?' she said. Was his name Leacock or Laycock?

'Last time we met,' she said, 'was at the races.' She connected im, incongruously, with a Cornish field, stone walls, farmers nd rough ponies jumping.

'No, that's Paul,' he said. 'My brother Paul.' He was tart about t. What did he do, then, that made him superior in his own steem to Paul?

'You live in London?' she said.

He nodded.

'You write?' she hazarded. But why, because he was a writer – she remembered now seeing his name in the papers – throw your head back when you say 'Yes'? She preferred Paul; he looked healthy; this one had a queer face; knit up; nerve-drawn; fixed.

'Poetry?' she said.

'Yes.' But why bite off that word as if it were a cherry on the end of a stalk? she thought. There was nobody coming; they were bound to sit down side by side, on chairs by the wall.

'How do you manage, if you're in an office?' she said. Apparently in his spare time.

'My uncle,' he began. '. . . You've met him?'

Yes, a nice commonplace man; he had been very kind to her about a passport once. This boy, of course, though she only half listened, sneered at him. Then why go into his office? she asked herself. My people, he was saying . . . hunted. Her attention wandered. She had heard it all before. I, I, I – he went on. It was like a vulture's beak pecking, or a vacuum-cleaner sucking, or a telephone bell ringing. I, I, I. But he couldn't help it, not with that nerve-drawn egotist's face, she thought, glancing at him. He

could not free himself, could not detach himself. He was b
on the wheel with tight iron hoops. He had to expose, h
exhibit. But why let him? she thought, as he went on tal
For what do I care about his 'I, I, I'? Or his poetry? Let me s
him off then, she said to herself, feeling like a person w
blood has been sucked, leaving all the nerve-centres pale
paused. He noted her lack of sympathy. He thought her st
she supposed.

'I'm tired,' she apologized. 'I've been up all night,' sh
plained. 'I'm a doctor—'

The fire went out of his face when she said 'I'. That's don
now he'll go, she thought. He can't be 'you' – he must be 'I'
smiled. For up he got and off he went.

She turned round and stood at the window. Poor little wr
she thought; atrophied, withered; cold as steel; hard as s
bald as steel. And I too, she thought, looking at the sky.
stars seemed pricked haphazard in the sky, except that the
the right over the chimney-pots, hung that phantom w
barrow – what did they call it? The name escaped her. I
count them, she thought, returning to her notebook, and
begun one, two, three, four . . . when a voice exclaimed be
her: 'Peggy! Aren't your ears tingling?' She turned. It was I
of course, with her genial ways, her imitation Irish flat
'—because they ought to be,' said Delia, laying a hand
her shoulder, 'considering what *he's* been saying' – she poi
to a grey-haired man – 'what praises he's been singin
you.'

Peggy looked where she pointed. There was her teacher
there, her master. Yes, she knew he thought her clever. She
she supposed. They all said so. Very clever.

'He's been telling me—' Delia began. But she broke off.

'Just help me open this window,' she said. 'It's getting hot

'Let me,' said Peggy. She gave the window a jerk, but it st
for it was old and the frames did not fit.

'Here, Peggy,' said somebody, coming behind her. It was
father. His hand was on the window, his hand with the scar
pushed; the window went up.

'Thanks, Morris, that's better,' said Delia. 'I was telling Pe
her ears ought to be tingling,' she began again: ' "My r
brilliant pupil!" That's what *he* said,' Delia went on. 'I as

you I felt quite proud. "But she's my niece," I said. He hadn't known it—'

There, said Peggy, that's pleasure. The nerve down her spine seemed to tingle as the praise reached her father. Each emotion touched a different nerve. A sneer rasped the thigh; pleasure thrilled the spine; and also affected the sight. The stars had softened; they quivered. Her father brushed her shoulder as he dropped his hand; but neither of them spoke.

'D'you want it open at the bottom too?' he said.

'No, that'll do,' said Delia. 'The room's getting hot,' she said. 'People are beginning to come. They must use the rooms downstairs,' she said. 'But who's that out there?' she pointed. Opposite the house against the railings of the square was a group in evening dress.

'I think I recognize one of them,' said Morris, looking out. 'That's North, isn't it?'

'Yes, that's North,' said Peggy, looking out.

'Then why don't they come in?' said Delia, tapping on the window.

'But you must come and see it for yourselves,' North was saying. They had asked him to describe Africa. He had said that there were mountains and plains; it was silent, he had said, and birds sang. He stopped; it was difficult to describe a place to people who had not seen it. Then curtains in the house opposite parted, and three heads appeared at the window. They looked at the heads outlined on the window opposite them. They were standing with their backs to the railings of the square. The trees hung dark showers of leaves over them. The trees had become part of the sky. Now and then they seemed to shift and shuffle slightly as a breeze went through them. A star shone among the leaves. It was silent too; the murmur of the traffic was run together into one far hum. A cat slunk past; for a second they saw the luminous green of the eyes; then it was extinguished. The cat crossed the lighted space and vanished. Someone tapped again on the window and cried, 'Come in!'

'Come!' said Renny, and threw his cigar into the bushes behind him. 'Come, we must.'

They went upstairs, past the doors of offices, past long windows that opened on to back gardens that lay behind

houses. Trees in full leaf stretched their branches acro different levels; the leaves, here bright green in the arti light, here dark in shadow, moved up and down in the breeze. Then they came to the private part of the house, w the red carpet was laid; and a roar of voices sounded behind a door as if a flock of sheep were penned there. music, a dance, swung out.

'Now,' said Maggie, pausing for a moment, outside the She gave their names to the servant.

'And you, sir?' said the maid to North, who hung behind.

'Captain Pargiter,' said North, touching his tie.

'And Captain Pargiter!' the maid called out.

Delia was upon them instantly. 'And Captain Pargiter!' exclaimed, as she came hurrying across the room. 'How nice of you to come!' she exclaimed. She took their hand random, here a left hand, there a right hand, in her left han her right hand.

'I thought it was you,' she exclaimed, 'standing in the sq I thought I could recognize Renny – but I wasn't sure a North. Captain Pargiter!' she wrung his hand, 'you're qu stranger – but a very welcome one! Now who d'you kn Who don't you know?'

She glanced round, twitching her shawl rather nervously.

'Let me see, there's all your uncles and aunts; and cousins; and your sons and daughters – yes, Maggie, I saw lovely couple not long ago. They're somewhere. . . . Only al generations in our family are so mixed; cousins and a uncles and brothers – but perhaps it's a good thing.'

She stopped rather suddenly as if she had used up that She twitched her shawl.

'They're going to dance,' she said, pointing at the young who was putting another record on the gramophone. 'It' right for dancing,' she added, referring to the gramophone. for music.' She became simple for a moment. 'I can't bear m on the gramophone. But dance music – that's another th And young people – don't you find that? – must dance. It's they should. Dance or not – just as you like.' She waved her h

'Yes, just as you like,' her husband echoed her. He st beside her, dangling his hands in front of him like a bea which coats are hung in a hotel.

'Just as you like,' he repeated, shaking his paws.

'Help me to move the tables, North,' said Delia. 'If they're going to dance, they'll want everything out of the way – and the rugs rolled up.' She pushed a table out of the way. Then she ran across the room to whisk a chair against the wall.

Now one of the vases was upset, and a stream of water flowed across the carpet.

'Don't mind it, don't mind it – it doesn't matter at all!' Delia exclaimed, assuming the manner of a harum-scarum Irish hostess. But North stooped and swabbed up the water.

'And what are you going to do with that pocket handkerchief?' Eleanor asked him; she had joined them in her flowing red cloak.

'Hang it on a chair to dry,' said North, walking off.

'And you, Sally?' said Eleanor, drawing back against the wall since they were going to dance. 'Going to dance?' she asked, sitting down.

'I?' said Sara, yawning. 'I want to sleep.' She sank down on a cushion beside Eleanor.

'But you don't come to parties,' Eleanor laughed, looking down at her, 'to sleep, do you?' Again she saw the little picture she had seen at the end of the telephone. But she could not see her face; only the top of her head.

'Dining with you, wasn't he?' she said, as North passed them with his handkerchief.

'And what did you talk about?' she asked. She saw her, sitting on the edge of a chair, swinging her foot up and down, with a smudge on her nose.

'Talk about?' said Sara. 'You, Eleanor.' People were passing them all the time; they were brushing against their knees; they were beginning to dance. It made one feel a little dizzy, Eleanor thought, sinking back in her chair.

'Me?' she said. 'What about me?'

'Your life,' said Sara.

'My life?' Eleanor repeated. Couples began to twist and turn slowly past them. It was a fox-trot that they were dancing she supposed.

My life, she said to herself. That was odd, it was the second time that evening that somebody had talked about her life. And I haven't got one, she thought. Oughtn't a life to be something you could handle and produce? – a life of seventy odd years. But

I've only the present moment, she thought. Here she was a
now, listening to the fox-trot. Then she looked round. There
Morris; Rose; Edward with his head thrown back talking
man she did not know. I'm the only person here, she thou
who remembers how he sat on the edge of my bed that ni
crying – the night Kitty's engagement was announced.
things came back to her. A long strip of life lay behind
Edward crying, Mrs Levy talking; snow falling; a sunflo
with a crack in it; the yellow omnibus trotting along the B
water Road. And I thought to myself, I'm the youngest pe
in this omnibus; now I'm the oldest. . . . Millions of things c
back to her. Atoms danced apart and massed themselves.
how did they compose what people called a life? She clenc
her hands and felt the hard little coins she was holding. Perh
there's 'I' at the middle of it, she thought; a knot; a centre;
again she saw herself sitting at her table drawing on the b
ting-paper, digging little holes from which spokes radiated.
and out they went; thing followed thing, scene oblitera
scene. And then they say, she thought, 'We've been talk
about you!'

'My life . . .' she said aloud, but half to herself.

'Yes?' said Sara, looking up.

Eleanor stopped. She had forgotten her. But there was so
body listening. Then she must put her thoughts into order; t
she must find words. But no, she thought, I can't find word
can't tell anybody.

'Isn't that Nicholas?' she said, looking at a rather large m
who stood in the doorway.

'Where?' said Sara. But she looked in the wrong direction.
had disappeared. Perhaps she had been mistaken. My life's b
other people's lives, Eleanor thought – my father's; Morris's;
friends' lives; Nicholas's. . . . Fragments of a conversation w
him came back to her. Either I'd been lunching with him
dining with him, she thought. It was in a restaurant. There
a parrot with a pink feather in a cage on the counter. And t
had sat there talking – it was after the war – about the futu
about education. And he wouldn't let me pay for the wine,
suddenly remembered, though it was I who ordered it. . . .

Here somebody stopped in front of her. She looked up. 'Jus
I was thinking of you!' she exclaimed.

It was Nicholas.

'Good-evening, madame!' he said, bending over her in his foreign way.

'Just as I was thinking of you!' she repeated. Indeed it was like a part of her, a sunk part of her, coming to the surface. Come and sit beside me,' she said, and pulled up a chair.

'D'you know who that chap is, sitting by my aunt?' said North to the girl he was dancing with. She looked round; but vaguely.

'I don't know your aunt,' she said. 'I don't know anybody here.'

The dance was over and they began walking towards the door.

'I don't even know my hostess,' she said. 'I wish you'd point her out to me.'

'There – over there,' he said. He pointed to Delia in her black dress with the gold spangles.

'Oh, that,' she said, looking at her. 'That's my hostess, is it?' He had not caught the girl's name, and she knew none of them either. He was glad of it. It made him seem different to himself – it stimulated him. He shepherded her towards the door. He wanted to avoid his relations. In particular he wanted to avoid his sister Peggy; but there she was, standing alone by the door. He looked the other way; he conveyed his partner out of the door. There must be a garden or a roof somewhere, he thought, where they could sit, alone. She was extraordinarily pretty and young.

'Come along,' he said, 'downstairs.'

'And what were you thinking about me?' said Nicholas, sitting down beside Eleanor.

She smiled. There he was in his rather ill-assorted dress-clothes, with the seal engraved with the arms of his mother the princess, and his swarthy wrinkled face that always made her think of some loose-skinned, furry animal, savage to others but kind to herself. But what was she thinking about him? She was thinking of him in the lump; she could not break off little fragments. The restaurant had been smoky she remembered.

'How we dined together once in Soho,' she said. '... d'you remember?'

'All the evenings with you I remember, Eleanor,' he said. But his glance was a little vague. His attention was distracted. He

was looking at a lady who had just come in; a well-dressed who stood with her back to the bookcase equipped for emergency. If I can't describe my own life, Eleanor thought can I describe him? For what he was she did not know; that it gave her pleasure when he came in; relieved her need of thinking; and gave her mind a little jog. He was lo at the lady. She seemed upheld by their gaze; vibrating und And suddenly it seemed to Eleanor that it had all hap before. So a girl had come in that night in the restaurant stood, vibrating, in the door. She knew exactly what he going to say. He had said it before, in the restaurant. He is to say, She is like a ball on the top of a fishmonger's fountai she thought it, he said it. Does everything then come over a little differently? she thought. If so, is there a pattern; a th recurring, like music; half remembered, half foreseen? gigantic pattern, momentarily perceptible? The thought her extreme pleasure: that there was a pattern. But who m it? Who thinks it? Her mind slipped. She could not finish thought.

'Nicholas . . .' she said. She wanted him to finish it; to tak thought and carry it out into the open unbroken; to ma whole, beautiful, entire.

'Tell me, Nicholas . . .' she began; but she had no notion she was going to finish her sentence, or what it was tha wanted to ask him. He was talking to Sara. She listened. He laughing at her. He was pointing at her feet.

'. . . coming to a party,' he was saying, 'with one stocking is white, and one stocking that is blue.'

'The Queen of England asked me to tea;' Sara humme time to the music; 'and which shall it be; the gold or the for all are in holes, my stockings, said she.' This is their making, Eleanor thought, half listening to their laughter, to bickering. Another inch of the pattern, she thought, still her half-formulated ideas to stamp the immediate scene. if this love-making differs from the old, still it has its char was 'love', different from the old love, perhaps, but worse, it? Anyhow, she thought, they are aware of each other, live in each other; what else is love, she asked, listening to laughter.

'. . . Can you never act for yourself?' he was saying. 'Can never even choose stockings for yourself?'

'Never! Never!' Sara was laughing.

'. . . Because you have no life of your own,' he said. 'She lives dreams,' he added, turning to Eleanor, 'alone.'

'The professor preaching his little sermon,' Sara sneered, ying her hand on his knee.

'Sara singing her little song,' Nicholas laughed, pressing her and.

But they are very happy, Eleanor thought: they laugh at each her.

'Tell me, Nicholas . . .' she began again. But another dance was eginning. Couples came flocking back into the room. Slowly, tently, with serious faces, as if they were taking part in some ystic rite which gave them immunity from other feelings, the ancers began circling past them, brushing against their knees, most treading on their toes. And then someone stopped in ont of them.

'Oh, here's North,' said Eleanor, looking up.

'North!' Nicholas exclaimed. 'North! We met this evening,' he retched out his hand to North, '—at Eleanor's.'

'We did,' said North warmly. Nicholas crushed his fingers; he elt them separate again when the hand was removed. It was ffusive; but he liked it. He was feeling effusive himself. His yes shone. He had lost his puzzled look completely. His adven- ure had turned out well. The girl had written her name in his ocket-book. 'Come and see me tomorrow at six,' she had said.

'Good-evening again, Eleanor,' he said, bowing over her hand. You're looking very young. You're looking extraordinarily andsome. I like you in those clothes,' he said, looking at her ndian cloak.

'The same to you, North,' she said. She looked up at him. She hought she had never seen him look so handsome, so vigorous.

'Aren't you going to dance?' she asked. The music was in full wing.

'Not unless Sally will honour me,' he said, bowing to her with xaggerated courtesy. What has happened to him? Eleanor hought. He looks so handsome, so happy. Sally rose. She gave er hand to Nicholas.

'I will dance with you,' she said. They stood for a moment vaiting; and then they circled away.

'What an odd-looking couple!' North exclaimed. He screwed

his face up into a grin as he watched them. 'They don't how to dance!' he added. He sat down by Eleanor in the that Nicholas had left empty.

'Why don't they marry?' he asked.

'Why should they?' she said.

'Oh, everybody ought to marry,' he said. 'And I like though he's a bit of a – shall we say "bounder?"' he sugg as he watched them circling rather awkwardly in and out.

' "Bounder"?' Eleanor echoed him.

'Oh it's his fob, you mean,' she added, looking at the gol which swung up and down as Nicholas danced.

'No, not a bounder,' she said aloud. 'He's—'

But North was not attending. He was looking at a cou the further end of the room. They were standing by the place. Both were young; both were silent; they seemed hel in that position by some powerful emotion. As he look them, some emotion about himself, about his own life, over him, and he arranged another background for them himself – not the mantelpiece and the bookcase, but cata roaring, clouds racing, and they stood on a cliff above a rent....

'Marriage isn't for everyone,' Eleanor interrupted.

He started. 'No. Of course not,' he agreed. He looked at She had never married. Why not? he wondered. Sacrificed t family, he supposed – old Grandpapa without any fingers. some memory came back to him of a terrace, a cigar and liam Whatney. Was not that her tragedy, that she had l him? He looked at her with affection. He felt fond of ever at the moment.

'What luck to find you alone, Nell!' he said, laying his han her knee.

She was touched; the feel of his hand on her knee pleased

'Dear North!' she exclaimed. She felt his excitement thr her dress; he was like a dog on a leash; straining for with all his nerves erect, she felt, as he laid his hand on knee.

'But don't marry the wrong woman!' she said.

'I?' he asked. 'What makes you say that?' Had she seen he wondered, shepherding the girl downstairs?

'Tell me—' she began. She wanted to ask him, coolly and sibly, what his plans were, now that they were alone; but as

poke she saw his face change; an exaggerated expression of iorror came over it.

'Milly!' he muttered. 'Damn her!'

Eleanor glanced quickly over her shoulder. Her sister Milly, oluminous in draperies proper to her sex and class, was coming owards them. She had grown very stout. In order to disguise ier figure, veils with beads on them hung down over her arms. hey were so fat that they reminded North of asparagus; pale sparagus tapering to a point.

'Oh, Eleanor!' she exclaimed. For she still kept relics of a ounger sister's doglike devotion.

'Oh, Milly!' said Eleanor, but not so cordially.

'How nice to see you, Eleanor!' said Milly, with her little old-voman's chuckle; yet there was something deferential in her nanner. 'And you too, North!'

She gave him her fat little hand. He noticed how the rings vere sunk in her fingers, as if the flesh had grown over them. lesh grown over diamonds disgusted him.

'How very nice that you're back again!' she said, settling lowly down into her chair. Everything, he felt, became dulled. she cast a net over them; she made them all feel one family; he iad to think of their relations in common; but it was an unreal eeling.

'Yes, we're staying with Connie,' she said; they had come up or a cricket match.

He sunk his head. He looked at his shoes.

'And I've not heard a word about your travels, Nell,' she vent on. They fall and fall, and cover all, he went on, as he istened to the damp falling patter of his aunt's little questions. But he was in such a superfluity of high spirits that he could still make her words jingle. Did the tarantulas bite, she was asking him, and were the stars bright? And where shall I spend tomorrow night? he added, for the card in his waistcoat pocket rayed out of its own accord without regard for the context scenes which obliterated the present moment. They were stay-ing with Connie, she went on, who was expecting Jimmy, who was home from Uganda . . . his mind slipped a few words, for he was seeing a garden, a room, and the next word he heard was 'adenoids' – which is a good word, he said to himself, separating it from its context; wasp-waisted; pinched in the middle; with a hard, shining, metallic abdomen, useful to describe the

appearance of an insect – but here a vast bulk approached; c
white waistcoat, lined with black; and Hugh Gibbs stood
them. North sprang up to offer him his chair.

'My dear boy, you don't expect me to sit on *that?*' said
deriding the rather spindly seat that North offered him.

'You must find me something—' he looked about him, ho
his hands to the sides of his white waistcoat, 'more
stantial.'

North pulled a stuffed seat towards him. He lowered hi
cautiously.

'Chew, chew, chew,' he said as he sat down.

And Milly said, 'Tut-tut-tut,' North observed.

That was what it came to – thirty years of being husban
wife – tut-tut-tut – and chew-chew-chew. It sounded lik
half-inarticulate munchings of animals in a stall. Tut-tu
and chew-chew-chew – as they trod out the soft steamy
in the stable; as they wallowed in the primeval swamp, pr
profuse, half-conscious, he thought; listening vaguely t
good-humoured patter, which suddenly fastened itself
him.

'What d'you weigh, North?' his uncle was asking, sizin
up. He looked him up and down as if he were a horse.

'We must get you to fix a date,' Milly added, 'when the
are home.'

They were inviting him to stay with them at the Tow
September for cub-hunting. The men shot, and the women
looked at his aunt as if she might be breaking into young
there, on that chair – the women broke off into innume
babies. And those babies had other babies; and the other b
had – adenoids. The word recurred; but it now sugg
nothing. He was sinking; he was falling under their weigh
name in his pocket even was fading. Could nothing be
about it? he asked himself. Nothing short of revolutio
thought. The idea of dynamite, exploding dumps of h
earth, shooting earth up in a tree-shaped cloud, came t
mind, from the War. But that's all poppycock, he tho
war's poppycock, poppycock. Sara's word 'poppycock
turned. So what remains? Peggy caught his eye, where she
talking to an unknown man. You doctors, he thought,
scientists, why don't you drop a little crystal into a tum
something starred and sharp, and make them swallo

ommon sense; reason; starred and sharp. But would they swal-ow it? He looked at Hugh. He had a way of blowing his cheeks n and out, as he said tut-tut-tut and chew-chew-chew. Would ou swallow it? he said silently to Hugh.

Hugh turned to him again.

'And I hope you're going to stay in England now, North,' he aid, 'though I dare say it's a fine life out there?'

And so they turned to Africa and the paucity of jobs. His xhilaration was oozing. The card no longer rayed out pictures. he damp leaves were falling. They fall and fall and cover all, he nurmured to himself and looked at his aunt, colourless save for brown stain on her forehead; and her hair colourless save for a tain like the yolk of egg on it. All over he suspected she must be oft and discoloured like a pear that has gone sleepy. And Hugh imself – his great hand was on his knee – was bound round vith raw beef-steak. He caught Eleanor's eye. There was a trained look in it.

'Yes, how they've spoilt it,' she was saying.

But the resonance had gone out of her voice.

'Brand-new villas everywhere,' she was saying. She had been lown in Dorsetshire apparently.

'Little red villas all along the road,' she went on.

'Yes, that's what strikes me,' he said, rousing himself to help ier, 'how you've spoilt England while I've been away.'

'But you won't find many changes in our part of the world, Vorth,' said Hugh. He spoke with pride.

'No. But then we're lucky,' said Milly. 'We have several large states. We're very lucky,' she repeated. 'Except for Mr Phipps,' he added. She gave a tart little laugh.

North woke up. She meant that, he thought. She spoke with n acerbity that made her real. Not only did she become real, out the village, the great house, the little house, the church and he circle of old trees also appeared before him in complete eality. He would stay with them.

'That's our parson,' Hugh explained. 'Quite a good chap in his vay; but high – very high. Candles – that sort of thing.'

'And his wife . . .' Milly began.

Here Eleanor sighed. North looked at her. She was dropping off to sleep. A glazed look, a fixed expression, had come over her ace. She looked terribly like Milly for a moment; sleep brought out the family likeness. Then she opened her eyes wide; by an

effort of will she kept them open. But obviously she
nothing.

'You must come down and see what you make of us,'
said. 'What about the first week in September, eh?' He sw
from side to side as if his benevolence rolled about in hin
was like an old elephant who may be going to kneel. And
does kneel, how will he ever get up again, North asked hin
And if Eleanor falls sound asleep and snores, what am I goi
do, left sitting here between the knees of the elephant?

He looked round for an excuse to go.

There was Maggie coming along, not looking where she
going. They saw her. He felt a strong desire to cry out, 'Take
Take care!' for she was in the danger zone. The long white
tacles that amorphous bodies leave floating so that they can c
their food, would suck her in. Yes, they saw her: she was lo

'Here's Maggie!' Milly exclaimed, looking up.

'Haven't seen you for an age!' said Hugh, trying to h
himself up.

She had to stop; to put her hand into that shapeless
Using the last ounce of energy that remained to him, from
address in his waistcoat pocket, North rose. He would carry
off. He would save her from the contamination of fa
life.

But she ignored him. She stood there, answering their g
ings with perfect composure as if using an outfit providec
emergencies. Oh Lord, North said to himself, she's as bad as
are. She was glazed; insincere. They were talking about
children now.

'Yes. That's the baby,' she was saying, pointing to a boy
was dancing with a girl.

'And your daughter, Maggie?' Milly asked, looking round.

North fidgeted. This is the conspiracy, he said to himself;
is the steam roller that smooths, obliterates; rounds into ic
ity; rolls into balls. He listened. Jimmy was in Uganda; Lily
in Leicestershire; *my* boy – *my* girl ... they were saying.
they're not interested in other people's children, he obser
Only in their own; their own property; their own flesh
blood, which they would protect with the unsheathed claw
the primeval swamp, he thought, looking at Milly's fat
paws, even Maggie, even she. For she too was talking a

my boy, my girl. How then can we be civilised, he asked himself?

Eleanor snored. She was nodding off, shamelessly, helplessly. There was an obscenity in unconsciousness, he thought. Her mouth was open; her head was on one side.

But now it was his turn. Silence gaped. One has to egg it on, he thought; somebody has to say something, or human society would cease. Hugh would cease; Milly would cease; and he was about to apply himself to find something to say, something with which to feed the immense vacancy of that primeval maw, when Delia, either from the erratic desire of a hostess always to interrupt, or divinely inspired by human charity – which he could not say – came beckoning.

'The Ludbys!' she exclaimed. 'The Ludbys!'

'Oh where? The dear Ludbys!' said Milly, and up they heaved and off they went, for the Ludbys, it appeared, seldom left Northumberland.

'Well, Maggie?' said North, turning to her – but here Eleanor made a little click at the back of her throat. Her head pitched forward. Sleep, now that she slept soundly, had given her dignity. She looked peaceful, far from them, rapt in the calm which sometimes gives the sleeper the look of the dead. They sat silent, for a moment, alone together, in private.

'Why – why – why –' he said at last, making a gesture as if he were plucking tufts of grass from the carpet.

'Why?' Maggie asked. 'Why what?'

'The Gibbses,' he murmured. He jerked his head at them, where they stood talking by the fireplace. Gross, obese, shapeless, they looked to him like a parody, a travesty, an excrescence that had overgrown the form within, the fire within.

'What's wrong?' he asked. She looked too. But she said nothing. Couples came dancing slowly past them. A girl stopped, and her gesture as she raised her hand, unconsciously, had the seriousness of the very young anticipating life in its goodness which touched him.

'Why – ?' he jerked his thumb in the direction of the young, 'when they're so lovely – '

She too looked at the girl, who was fastening a flower that had come undone in the front of her frock. She smiled. She said nothing. Then half consciously she echoed his question without a meaning in her echo, 'Why?'

He was dashed for a moment. It seemed to him that refused to help him. And he wanted her to help him. should she not take the weight off his shoulders and give what he longed for – assurance, certainty? Because she too deformed like the rest of them? He looked down at her ha They were strong hands; fine hands; but if it were a questior thought, watching the fingers curl slightly, of 'my' childrer 'my' possessions, it would be one rip down the belly; or t in the soft fur of the throat. We cannot help each other thought, we are all deformed. Yet, disagreeable as it wa him to remove her from the eminence upon which he placed perhaps she was right, he thought, and we who make idol other people, who endow this man, that woman, with powe lead us, only add to the deformity, and stoop ourselves.

'I'm going to stay with them,' he said aloud.

'At the Towers?' she asked.

'Yes,' he said. 'For cubbing in September.'

She was not listening. Her eyes were on him. She was get him into relation with something else he felt. It made uneasy. She was looking at him as if he were not himself somebody else. He felt again the discomfort that he had when Sally described him on the telephone.

'I know,' he said, stiffening the muscles of his face, 'I'm the picture of a Frenchman holding his hat.'

'Holding his hat?' she asked.

'And getting fat,' he added.

'... Holding a hat ... who's holding a hat?' said Eleanor, o ing her eyes.

She glanced about her in bewilderment. Since her last re lection, and it seemed only a second ago, was of Milly talkin candles in a church, something must have happened. Milly Hugh had been there; but they were gone. There had been a – a gap filled with the golden light of lolling candles, and s sensation which she could not name.

She woke up completely.

'What nonsense are you talking?' she said. 'North's not h ing a hat! And he's not fat,' she added. 'Not at all, not at all,' repeated, patting him affectionately on the knee.

She felt extraordinarily happy. Most sleep left some drear one's mind – some scene or figure remained when one woke

But this sleep, this momentary trance, in which the candles had lolled and lengthened themselves, had left her with nothing but a feeling; a feeling, not a dream.

'He's not holding a hat,' she repeated.

They both laughed at her.

'You've been dreaming, Eleanor,' said Maggie.

'Have I?' she said. A deep gulf had been cut in the talk, it was true. She could not remember what they had been saying. There was Maggie; but Milly and Hugh had gone.

'Only a second's nap,' she said. 'But what are you going to do, North? What are your plans?' she said, speaking rather quickly.

'We mustn't let him go back, Maggie,' she said. 'Not to that horrid farm.'

She wished to appear extremely practical, partly to prove that she had not slept, partly to protect the extraordinary feeling of happiness that still remained with her. Covered up from observation it might survive, she felt.

'You've saved enough, haven't you?' she said aloud.

'Saved enough?' he said. Why, he wondered, did people who had been asleep always want to make out that they were extremely wide-awake? 'Four or five thousand,' he added at random.

'Well, that's enough,' she insisted. 'Five per cent; six per cent—' She tried to do the sum in her head. She appealed to Maggie for help. 'Four or five thousand – how much would that be, Maggie? Enough to live on, wouldn't it?'

'Four or five thousand,' repeated Maggie.

'At five or six per cent . . .' Eleanor put in. She could never do sums in her head at the best of times; but for some reason it seemed to her very important to bring things back to facts. She opened her bag, found a letter, and produced a stubby little pencil.

'There – work it out on that,' she said. Maggie took the paper and drew a few lines with the pencil as if to test it. North glanced over her shoulder. Was she solving the problem before her – was she considering his life, his needs? No. She was drawing, apparently a caricature – he looked – of a big man opposite in a white waistcoat. It was a farce. It made him feel slightly ridiculous.

'Don't be so silly,' he said.

'That's my brother,' she said, nodding at the man in the w waistcoat. 'He used to take us for rides on an elephant. . . .' added a flourish to the waistcoat.

'And we're being very sensible,' Eleanor protested.

'If you want to live in England, North – if you want—'

He cut her short.

'I don't know what I want,' he said.

'Oh, I see!' she said. She laughed. Her feeling of happi returned to her, her unreasonable exaltation. It seemed to that they were all young, with the future before them. Not was fixed; nothing was known; life was open and free be them.

'Isn't that odd?' she exclaimed. 'Isn't that queer? Isn't why life's a perpetual – what shall I call it? – miracle? . mean,' she tried to explain, for he looked puzzled, 'old age t say is like this; but it isn't. It's different; quite different. So w I was a child; so when I was a girl; it's been a perpetual covery, my life. A miracle.' She stopped. She was rambling again. She felt rather light-headed, after her dream.

'There's Peggy!' she exclaimed, glad to attach herself to so thing solid. 'Look at her! Reading a book!'

Peggy, marooned when the dance started, over by the bo case, stood as close to it as she could. In order to cover loneliness she took down a book. It was bound in green leat and had, she noted as she turned it in her hands, little gilt s tooled upon it. Which is all to the good, she thought, turnin over, because then it'll seem as if I were admiring the bind . . . But I can't stand here admiring the binding, she thought. opened it. He'll say what I'm thinking, she thought as she dic Books opened at random always did.

'La médiocrité de l'univers m'étonne et me révolte,' read. That was it. Precisely. She read on. '. . . *la petitesse toutes choses m'emplit de dégoût* . . .' She lifted her eyes. T were treading on her toes. '. . . *la pauvreté des êtres hum m'anéantit.*' She shut the book and put it back on the shelf.

'Precisely,' she said.

She turned her watch on her wrist and looked at it reptitiously. Time was getting on. An hour is sixty minutes, said to herself; two hours are one hundred and twenty minu How many have I still to stay here? Could she go yet? She s

Eleanor beckoning. She put the book back on the shelf. She went towards them.

'Come, Peggy, come and talk to us,' Eleanor called out, beckoning.

'D'you know what time it is, Eleanor?' said Peggy, coming up to them. She pointed to her watch. 'Don't you think it's time to be going?' she said.

'I'd forgotten the time,' said Eleanor.

'But you'll be so tired tomorrow,' Peggy protested, standing beside her.

'How like a doctor!' North twitted her. 'Health, health, health!' he exclaimed. 'But health's not an end in itself,' he said, looking up at her.

She ignored him.

'D'you mean to stay to the end?' she said to Eleanor. 'This'll go on all night.' She looked at the twisting couples gyrating in time to the tune on the gramophone, as if some animal were dying in a slow but exquisite anguish.

'But we're enjoying ourselves,' said Eleanor. 'Come and enjoy yourself too.'

She pointed to the floor at her side. Peggy let herself down on to the floor at her side. Give up brooding, thinking, analysing, Eleanor meant she knew. Enjoy the moment – but could one? she asked, pulling her skirts round her feet as she sat down. Eleanor bent over and tapped her on the shoulder.

'I want you to tell me,' she said, drawing her into the conversation, since she looked so glum, 'you're a doctor – you know these things – what do dreams mean?'

Peggy laughed. Another of Eleanor's questions. Does two and two make four – and what is the nature of the universe?

'I don't mean dreams exactly,' Eleanor went on. 'Feelings – feelings that come when one's asleep?'

'My dear Nell,' said Peggy, glancing up at her, 'how often have I told you? Doctors know very little about the body; absolutely nothing about the mind.' She looked down again.

'I always said they were humbugs!' North exclaimed.

'What a pity!' said Eleanor. 'I was hoping you'd be able to explain to me—' She was bending down. There was a flush on her cheek, Peggy noted; she was excited; but what was there to be excited about?

'Explain – what?' she asked.

'Oh, nothing,' said Eleanor. Now I've snubbed her, P thought.

She looked at her again. Her eyes were bright; her ch were flushed, or was it only the tan from her voyage to In And a little vein stood out on her forehead. But what was t to be excited about? She leant back against the wall. From seat on the floor she had a queer view of people's feet; pointing this way, feet pointing that way; patent lea pumps; satin slippers; silk stockings and socks. They were d ing rhythmically, insistently, to the tune of the foxtrot. what about the cocktail and the tea, said he to me, said he to – the tune seemed to repeat over and over again. And vo went on over her head. Odd little gusts of inconsecutive versations reached her . . . down in Norfolk where my brothe law has a boat . . . Oh, a complete washout, yes I agree. People talked nonsense at parties. And beside her Maggie talking; North was talking; Eleanor was talking. Sudde Eleanor swept her hand out.

'There's Renny!' she was saying. 'Renny, whom I never Renny whom I love. . . . Come and talk to us, Renny.' And a of pumps crossed Peggy's field of vision and stopped in fron her. He sat down beside Eleanor. She could just see the lin his profile; the big nose; the thin cheek. And what about cocktails and the tea, said he to me, said he to me, the m ground out; the couples danced past. But the little group on chairs above her were talking; they were laughing.

'I know you'll agree with me . . .' Eleanor was say Through her half-shut eyes Peggy could see Renny turn tow her. She saw his thin cheek; his big nose; his nails, she noti were very close cut.

'Depends what you were saying . . .' he said.

'What were we saying?' Eleanor pondered. She's forgo already, Peggy suspected.

'. . . That things have changed for the better,' she he Eleanor's voice.

'Since you were a girl?' That she thought was Maggie's voi

Then a voice from a skirt with a pink bow on the hem in rupted. '. . . I don't know how it is but the heat doesn't affect as much as it used to do. . . .' She looked up. There were fift pink bows on the dress, accurately stitched, and wasn't

Miriam Parrish's little saint-like, sheep-like head on top?

'What I mean is, we've changed in ourselves,' Eleanor was saying. 'We're happier – we're freer. . . .'

What does she mean by 'happiness,' by 'freedom'? Peggy asked herself, lapsing against the wall again.

'Take Renny and Maggie,' she heard Eleanor saying. And then she stopped. And then she went on again:

'D'you remember, Renny, the night of the raid? When I met Nicholas for the first time . . . when we sat in the cellar? . . . Going downstairs I said to myself, That's a happy marriage. . . .' There was another pause. 'I said to myself,' she continued, and Peggy saw her hand laid on Renny's knee, 'If I'd known Renny when I was young. . . .' She stopped. Does she mean she would have fallen in love with him? Peggy wondered. Again the music interrupted . . . said he to me, said he to me. . . .

'No, never . . .' she heard Eleanor say. 'No, never. . . .' Was she saying she had never been in love, never wanted to marry? Peggy wondered. They were laughing.

'Why, you look like a girl of eighteen!' she heard North say.

'And I feel like one!' Eleanor exclaimed. But you'll be a wreck tomorrow morning Peggy thought, looking at her. She was flushed, the veins stood out on her forehead.

'I feel . . .' she stopped. She put her hand to her head: 'as if I'd been in another world! So happy!' she exclaimed.

'Tosh, Eleanor, tosh,' said Renny.

I thought he'd say that, Peggy said to herself with some queer satisfaction. She could see his profile as he sat on the other side of her aunt's knee. The French are logical; they are sensible, she thought. Still, she added, why not let Eleanor have her little flutter if she enjoys it?

'Tosh? What d'you mean by "tosh"?' Eleanor was asking. She was leaning forward; she held her hand up as if she wanted him to speak.

'Always talking of the other world,' he said. 'Why not this one?'

'But I meant this world!' she said. 'I meant, happy in this world – happy with living people.' She waved her hand as if to embrace the miscellaneous company, the young, the old, the dancers, the talkers; Miriam with her pink bows, and the Indian in his turban. Peggy sank back against the wall. Happy in this world, she thought, happy with living people!

The music stopped. The young man who had been put records on the gramophone had walked off. The couples b apart and began to push their way through the door. They going to eat perhaps; they were going to stream out into back garden and sit on hard sooty chairs. The music which been cutting grooves in her mind had ceased. There was a l a silence. Far away she heard the sounds of the London nigl horn hooted; a siren wailed on the river. The far-away sou the suggestion they brought in of other worlds, indifferen this world, of people toiling, grinding, in the heart of darkı in the depths of night, made her say over Eleanor's wo Happy in this world, happy with living people. But how can be 'happy'? she asked herself, in a world bursting with mis On every placard at every street corner was Death; or wor tyranny; brutality; torture; the fall of civilization; the en freedom. We here, she thought, are only sheltering under a which will be destroyed. And then Eleanor says the worl better, because two people out of all those millions are 'hap Her eyes had fixed themselves on the floor; it was empty save for a wisp of muslin torn from some skirt. But why notice everything? she thought. She shifted her position. must I think? She did not want to think. She wished that t were blinds like those in railway carriages that came down the light and hooded the mind. The blue blind that one p down on a night journey, she thought. Thinking was torm why not give up thinking, and drift and dream? But the mis of the world, she thought, forces me to think. Or was th pose? Was she not seeing herself in the becoming attitude of who points to his bleeding heart? to whom the miseries of world are misery, when in fact, she thought, I do not love kind. Again she saw the ruby-splashed pavement, and f mobbed at the door of a picture palace; apathetic, passive fa the faces of people drugged with cheap pleasures; who had even the courage to be themselves, but must dress up, imit pretend. And here, in this room, she thought, fixing her eyes a couple. . . . But I will not think, she repeated; she would fo her mind to become a blank and lie back, and accept quie tolerantly, whatever came.

She listened. Scraps reached her from above. '. . . flats in H gate have bathrooms,' they were saying. '. . . Your mother Digby. . . . Yes, Crosby's still alive. . . .' It was family gossip,

ey were enjoying it. But how can I enjoy it? she said to her-lf. She was too tired; the skin round her eyes felt taut; a hoop as bound tight over her head; she tried to think herself away to the darkness of the country. But it was impossible; they ere laughing. She opened her eyes, exacerbated by their laugh-r.

That was Renny laughing. He held a sheet of paper in his and; his head was flung back; his mouth was wide open. From came a sound like Ha! Ha! Ha! That is laughter, she said to erself. That is the sound people make when they are amused.

She watched him. Her muscles began to twitch involuntarily. ie could not help laughing too. She stretched out her hand and enny gave her the paper. It was folded; they had been playing game. Each of them had drawn a different part of a picture. n top there was a woman's head like Queen Alexandra, with a izz of little curls; then a bird's neck; the body of a tiger; and out elephant's legs dressed in child's drawers completed the icture.

'I drew that – I drew that!' said Renny pointing to the legs om which a long trail of ribbon depended. She laughed, ughed, laughed; she could not help laughing.

'The face that launched a thousand ships!' said North, point-g to another part of the monster's person. They all laughed gain. She stopped laughing; her lips smoothed themselves out. ut her laughter had had some strange effect on her. It had elaxed her, enlarged her. She felt, or rather she saw, not a lace, but a state of being, in which there was real laughter, real appiness, and this fractured world was whole; whole, and free. ut how could she say it?

'Look here ...' she began. She wanted to express something iat she felt to be very important; about a world in which eople were whole, in which people were free ... But they were ughing; she was serious. 'Look here ...' she began again.

Eleanor stopped laughing.

'Peggy wants to say something,' she said. The others stopped alking, but they had stopped at the wrong moment. She had othing to say when it came to the point, and yet she had to peak.

'Here,' she began again, 'here you all are – talking about Iorth—' He looked up at her in surprise. It was not what she ad meant to say, but she must go on now that she had begun.

Their faces gaped at her like birds with their mouths ope How he's to live, where he's to live,' she went on. '. . . But the use, what's the point of saying that?'

She looked at her brother. A feeling of animosity pos her. He was still smiling, but his smile smoothed itself out looked at him.

'What's the use?' she said, facing him. 'You'll marry. have children. What'll you do then? Make money. Writ books to make money. . . .'

She had got it wrong. She had meant to say something sonal, but she was being personal. It was done now hov she must flounder on now.

'You'll write one little book, and then another little boo said viciously, 'instead of living . . . living differentl erently.'

She stopped. There was the vision still, but she ha grasped it. She had broken off only a little fragment of wh meant to say, and she had made her brother angry. Yet t hung before her, the thing she had seen, the thing she h said. But as she fell back with a jerk against the wall, s relieved of some oppression; her heart thumped; the ve her forehead stood out. She had not said it, but she had tr say it. Now she could rest; now she could think herself under the shadow of their ridicule, which had no power t her, into the country. Her eyes half shut; it seemed to he she was on a terrace, in the evening; an owl went up and up and down; its white wing showed on the dark of the and she heard country people singing and the rattle of v on a road.

Then gradually the blur became distinct; she saw the l the bookcase opposite; the wisp of muslin on the floor; an large feet, in tight shoes, so that the bunions showed, stop front of her.

For a moment nobody moved; nobody spoke. Peggy sa She did not want to move, or to speak. She wanted to r lean, to dream. She felt very tired. Then more feet stoppe the hem of a black skirt.

'Aren't you people coming down to supper?' said a chu little voice. She looked up. It was her aunt Milly, with he band by her side.

'Supper's downstairs,' said Hugh. 'Supper's downstairs.' And ey passed on.

'How prosperous they've grown!' said North's voice, laughing them.

'Ah, but they're so good to people . . .' Eleanor protested. The nse of the family again, Peggy noted.

Then the knee against which she was sheltering herself oved.

'We must go,' said Eleanor. Wait, wait, Peggy wanted to im-ore her. There was something she wanted to ask her; some-ing she wanted to add to her outburst, since nobody had tacked her, and nobody had laughed at her. But it was useless; e knees straightened themselves; the red cloak elongated self; Eleanor had risen. She was hunting for her bag or her andkerchief; she was ferreting in the cushions of her chair. As sual, she had lost something.

'I'm sorry to be such an old muddler,' she apologized. She ook a cushion; coins rolled out on to the floor. A sixpenny bit un on its edge across the carpet, reached a pair of silver shoes n the floor and fell flat.

'There!' Eleanor exclaimed. 'There! . . . But that's Kitty! isn't ?' she exclaimed.

Peggy looked up. A handsome elderly woman, with curled hite hair and something shining in her hair was standing in e doorway looking round her, as if she had just come in and ere looking for her hostess, who was not there. It was at her et that the sixpence had fallen.

'Kitty!' Eleanor repeated. She went towards her with her ands stretched out. They all got up. Peggy got up. Yes, it was ver; it was destroyed she felt. Directly something got together, broke. She had a feeling of desolation. And then you have to ick up the pieces, and make something new, something ifferent, she thought, and crossed the room, and joined the reigner, the man she called Brown, whose real name was icholas Pomjalovsky.

'Who is that lady,' Nicholas asked her, 'who appears to come to a room as if the whole world belonged to her?'

'That's Kitty Lasswade,' said Peggy. As she stood in the door, ey could not pass.

'I'm afraid I'm dreadfully late,' they heard her saying in her ear, authoritative tones. 'But I've been to the ballet.'

That's Kitty, is it? North said to himself, looking at h was one of those well-set-up rather masculine old ladi repelled him slightly. He thought he remembered that s the wife of one of our governors; or was it the Viceroy o He could see her, as she stood there, doing the hon Government House. 'Sit here. Sit there. And you, young hope you take plenty of exercise?' He knew the type. Sh short straight nose and blue eyes very wide apart. She have looked very dashing in the eighties, he thought; in riding-habit; worn a small hat, with a cock's father perhaps had an affair with an aide-de-camp; and then down, become dictatorial, and told stories about her p listened.

'Ah, but he's not a patch on Nijinsky!' she was saying.

The sort of thing she would say, he thought. He exami books in the bookcase. He took one out and held it upside One little book, and then another little book – Peggy's returned to him. The words had stung him out of all pro to their surface meaning. She had turned on him wit violence, as if she despised him; she had looked as if sh going to burst into tears. He opened the little book. Lat it? He broke off a sentence and let it swim in his mind. Th words lay, beautiful, yet meaningless, yet composed in a – *nox est perpetua una dormienda*. He remembered his saying, Mark the long word at the end of the sentence. the words floated; but just as they were about to give ou meaning, there was a movement at the door. Old Patri come ambling up, had given his arm gallantly to the wi the Governor-General, and they were proceeding with a c air of antiquated ceremony down the stairs. The others be follow them. The younger generation following in the w the old, North said to himself as he put the book back shelf and followed. Only, he observed, they were not s young; Peggy – there were white hairs on Peggy's head must be thirty-seven, thirty-eight?

'Enjoying yourself, Peg?' he said as they hung back behi others. He had a vague feeling of hostility towards he seemed to him bitter, disillusioned, and very critical of one, especially of himself.

'You go first, Patrick,' they heard Lady Lasswade boom

r genial loud voice. 'These staircases are not adapted . . .' she used, as she advanced what was probably a rheumatic leg, or old people who . . .' there was another pause as she de-ended another step, ' 've been kneeling on damp grass killing ugs.'

North looked at Peggy and laughed. He had not expected the ntence to end like that, but the widows of viceroys, he ought, always have gardens, always kill slugs. Peggy smiled o. But he felt uncomfortable with her. She had attacked him. nere they stood, however, side by side.

'Did you see old William Whatney?' she said, turning to him.

'No!' he exclaimed. '*He* still alive? That old white walrus with e whiskers?'

'Yes – that's him,' she said. There was an old man in a white aistcoat standing in the door.

'The old Mock Turtle,' he said. They had to fall back on child-h slang, on childish memories, to cover their distance, their ostility.

'D'you remember . . .' he began.

'The night of the row?' she said. 'The night I let myself out of e window by a rope.'

'And we picnicked in the Roman camp,' he said.

'We should never have been found out if that horrid little amp hadn't told on us,' she said, descending a step.

'A little beast with pink eyes,' said North.

They could think of nothing else to say, as they stood ocked, waiting for the others to move on, side by side. And he sed to read her his poetry in the apple-loft, he remembered, nd as they walked up and down by the rose bushes. And now ey had nothing to say to each other.

'Perry,' he said, descending another step, suddenly remem-ering the name of the pink-eyed boy who had seen them oming home that morning and had told on them.

'Alfred,' she added.

She still knew certain things about him, he thought; they still ad something very profound in common. That was why, he ought, she had hurt him by what she had said, before the thers, about his 'writing little books.' It was their past con-emning his present. He glanced at her.

Damn women, he thought, they're so hard; so unimaginative. urse their little inquisitive minds. What did their 'education'

amount to? It only made her critical, censorious. Old E with all her rambling and stumbling, was worth a do Peggy any day. She was neither one thing nor the oth thought, glancing at her; neither in the fashion nor it.

She felt him look at her and look away. He was finding with something about her, she knew. Her hands? Her dres it was because she criticized him, she thought. Yes, she th as she descended another step, now I'm going to be trou now I'm going to be paid back for telling him he'd write books'. It takes from ten to fifteen minutes, she thought, an answer; and then it'll be something off the point but dis able – very, she thought. The vanity of men was immeasu She waited. He looked at her again. And now he's compari with the girl I saw him talking to, she thought, and saw the lovely, hard face. He'll tie himself up with a red-lippe and become a drudge. He must, and I can't, she thought. N a sense of guilt always. I shall pay for it, I shall pay for it, saying to myself even in the Roman camp, she though would have no children, and he would produce little Gi more little Gibbses, she thought, looking in at the doo solicitor's office, unless she leaves him at the end of the ye some other man. ... The solicitor's name was Alridg noted. But I will take no more notes; I will enjoy mysel thought suddenly. She put her hand on his arm.

'Met anybody amusing tonight?' she said.

He guessed that she had seen him with the girl.

'One girl,' he said briefly.

'So I saw,' she said.

She looked away.

'I thought her lovely,' she said, carefully observing a picture of a bird with a long beak that hung on the stairs.

'Shall I bring her to see you?' he asked.

So he cared for her opinion, did he? Her hand was still arm; she felt something hard and taut beneath the sleeve the touch of his flesh, bringing back to her the nearn human beings and their distance, so that if one meant to one hurt, yet they depended on each other, produced in he a tumult of sensation that she could scarcely keep herself crying out, North! North! North! But I mustn't make a f myself again, she said to herself.

'Any evening after six,' she said aloud, carefully descending nother step, and they reached the bottom of the stairs.

A roar of voices sounded from behind the door of the supper oom. She withdrew her hand from his arm. The door burst pen.

'Spoons! spoons! spoons!' cried Delia, brandishing her arms in rhetorical manner as if she were still declaiming to someone nside. She caught sight of her nephew and niece. 'Be an angel, Iorth, and fetch spoons!' she cried, throwing her hands out owards him.

'Spoons for the widow of the Governor-General!' North cried, atching her manner, imitating her dramatic gesture.

'In the kitchen, in the basement!' Delia cried, waving her arm t the kitchen stairs. 'Come, Peggy, come,' she said, catching eggy's hand in hers, 'we're all sitting down to supper.' She urst into the room where they were having supper. It was rowded. People were sitting on the floor, on chairs, on office tools. Long office tables, little typewriting tables, had been ressed into use. They were strewn with flowers, frilled with lowers. Carnations, roses, daisies, were flung down higgledy-iggledy. 'Sit on the floor, sit anywhere,' Delia commanded, vaving her hand promiscuously.

'Spoons are coming,' she said to Lady Lasswade, who was lrinking her soup out of a mug.

'But I don't want a spoon,' said Kitty. She tilted the mug and lrank.

'No, you wouldn't,' said Delia, 'but other people do.'

North brought in a bunch of spoons and she took them from im.

'Now who wants a spoon and who doesn't?' she said, brandishing the bunch of spoons in front of her. Some people do and ome don't, she thought.

Her sort of people, she thought, did not want spoons; the thers – the English – did. She had been making that distinction between people all her life.

'A spoon? A spoon?' she said, looking round her at the crowded room with some complacency. All sorts of people were there, she noted. That had always been her aim; to mix people; to do away with the absurd conventions of English life. And she had done it tonight, she thought. There were nobles

and commoners; people dressed and people not dressed; p
drinking out of mugs, and people waiting with their sou
ting cold for a spoon to be brought to them.

'A spoon for me,' said her husband, looking up at her.

She wrinkled her nose. For the thousandth time he
dashed her dream. Thinking to marry a wild rebel, she had
ried the most King-respecting, Empire-admiring of co
gentlemen, and for that very reason partly – because he
even now, such a magnificent figure of a man. 'A spoon for
Uncle,' she said dryly, and sent North off with the bunch.
she sat down beside Kitty, who was gulping her soup like a
at a school treat. She set down her mug empty, amon
flowers.

'Poor flowers,' she said, taking up a carnation that lay o
table-cloth and putting it to her lips. 'They'll die, Delia –
want water.'

'Roses are cheap today,' said Delia. 'Twopence a bunch
barrow in Oxford Street,' she said. She took up a red rose
held it under the light, so that it shone, veined, semi-transpa

'What a rich country England is!' she said, laying it
again. She took up her mug.

'What I'm always telling you,' said Patrick, wiping
mouth. 'The only civilized country in the whole world
added.

'I thought we were on the verge of a smash,' said Kitty.
that it looked much like it at Covent Garden tonight,' she a

'Ah, but it's true,' he sighed, going on with his own thou
'I'm sorry to say it – but we're savages compared with you.

'He won't be happy till he's got Dublin Castle back a
Delia twitted him.

'You don't enjoy your freedom?' said Kitty, looking a
queer old man whose face always made her think of a
gooseberry. But his body was magnificent.

'It seems to me that our new freedom is a good deal w
than our old slavery,' said Patrick, fumbling with his tooth

Politics as usual, money and politics, North thought,
hearing them as he went round with the last of his spoons.

'You're not going to tell me that all that struggle has be
vain, Patrick?' said Kitty.

'Come to Ireland and see for yourself, m'lady,' he said gri

'It's too early – too early to tell,' said Delia.

Her husband looked past her with the sad innocent eyes of an old sporting dog whose hunting days are over. But they could not keep their fixity for long. 'Who's this chap with the spoons?' he said, resting his eyes on North, who stood just behind them, waiting.

'North,' said Delia. 'Come and sit by us, North.'

'Good-evening to you, Sir,' said Patrick. They had met already, but he had already forgotten.

'What, Morris's son?' said Kitty, turning round abruptly. She shook hands cordially. He sat down and took a gulp of soup.

'He's just back from Africa. He's been on a farm there,' said Delia.

'And how does the old country strike you?' said Patrick, leaning towards him genially.

'Very crowded,' he said, looking round the room. 'And you all talk,' he added, 'about money and politics.' That was his stock phrase. He had said it twenty times already.

'You were in Africa?' said Lady Lasswade. 'And what made you give up your farm?' she demanded. She looked him in the eyes and spoke just as he expected she would speak; too imperiously for his liking. What business is that of yours, old lady? he asked himself.

'I'd had about enough of it,' he said aloud.

'And I'd have given anything to be a farmer!' she exclaimed. That was a little out of the picture, North thought. So were her eyes; she ought to have worn a pince-nez; but she did not.

'But in my youth,' she said, rather fiercely – her hands were rather stubby, and the skin was rough, but she gardened, he remembered – 'that wasn't allowed.'

'No,' said Patrick. 'And it's my belief,' he continued, drumming on the table with a fork, 'that we should all be very glad, very glad, to go back to things as they were. What's the War done for us, eh? Ruined me for one.' He wagged his head with melancholy tolerance from side to side.

'I'm sorry to hear that,' said Kitty. 'But speaking for myself, the old days were bad days, wicked days, cruel days. . . .' Her eyes turned blue with passion.

What about the aide-de-camp, and the hat with a cock's feather in it? North asked himself.

'Don't you agree with me, Delia?' said Kitty, turning to her. But Delia was talking across her, using her rather exaggerated

Irish sing-song to someone at the next table. Don't I rem this room, Kitty thought; a meeting; an argument. But was it about? Force . . .

'My dear Kitty,' Patrick interrupted, patting her hand wi great paw. 'That's another instance of what I'm telling Now these ladies have got the vote,' he said, turning to N 'are they any better off?'

Kitty looked fierce for a moment; then she smiled.

'We won't argue, my old friend,' she said, giving him a pat on the hand.

'And it's just the same with the Irish,' he went on. Nort that he was bent on treading out the round of his fa thoughts like an old broken-winded horse. 'They'd be enough to join the Empire again, I assure you. I come family,' he said to North, 'that has served its king and co for three hundred—'

'English settlers,' said Delia, rather shortly, returning t soup. That's what they quarrel about when they're alone, N thought.

'We've been three hundred years in the country,' old Pa continued, padding out his round – he laid a hand on No arm, 'and what strikes an old fellow like me, an old fogy me—'

'Nonsense, Patrick,' Delia struck in, 'I've never seen you younger. Might be fifty, mightn't he, North?'

But Patrick shook his head.

'I shan't see seventy again,' he said simply. '. . . But strikes an old fellow like me,' he continued, patting North's 'is with such a lot of good feeling about,' he nodded r vaguely at a placard that was pinned to the wall – 'and things too,' – he referred perhaps to the flowers, but his jerked involuntarily as he talked – 'what do these fellows to be shooting each other for? I don't join any societies; I sign any of these' – he pointed to the placard – 'what d'you 'em? manifestoes – I just go to my friend Mike, or it may b – they're all good friends of mine, and we—'

He stooped and pinched his foot.

'Lord, these shoes!' he complained.

'Tight, are they?' said Kitty. 'Kick 'em off.'

Why had the poor old boy been brought over here, N wondered, and stuck into those tight shoes? He was clearly

ing to his dogs. There was a look in his eyes now when he raised them again and tried to recover the drift of what he had been saying that was like the look of a sportsman who saw the birds rising in a semicircle over the wide green bog. But they were out of shot. He could not remember where he had got to. '... We talk things over,' he said, 'round a table.' His eyes became mild and vacant as if the engine were cut off, and his mind glided on silently.

'The English talk too,' said North perfunctorily. Patrick nodded, and looked vaguely at a group of young people. But he was not interested in what other people were saying. His mind could no longer stretch beyond its beat. His body was still beautifully proportioned; it was his mind that was old. He would say the same thing all over again, and when he had said it he would pick his teeth and sit gazing in front of him. There he sat now, holding a flower between his finger and thumb, loosely, without looking at it, as if his mind were gliding on.... But Delia interrupted.

'North must go and talk to his friends,' she said. Like so many wives, she saw when her husband was becoming a bore, North thought, as he got up.

'Don't wait to be introduced,' said Delia, waving her hand. 'Do just what you like – just what you like,' her husband echoed her, beating on the table with his flower.

North was glad to go; but where was he to go now? He was an outsider, he felt again, as he glanced round the room. All these people knew each other. They called each other – he stood on the outskirts of a little group of young men and women – by their Christian names, by their nicknames. Each was already part of a little group, he felt as he listened, keeping on the outskirts. He wanted to hear what they were saying; but not to be drawn in himself. He listened. They were arguing. Politics and money, he said to himself; money and politics. That phrase came in handy. But he could not understand the argument, which was already heated. Never have I felt so lonely, he thought. The old platitude about solitude in a crowd was true; for hills and trees accept one; human beings reject one. He turned his back and pretended to read the particulars of a desirable property at Bexhill which Patrick had called for some reason 'a manifesto'. 'Running water in all the bedrooms,' he

read. He overheard scraps of talk. That's Oxford, that's H
he continued, recognizing the tricks of speech that were
at school and college. It seemed to him that they we
cutting little private jokes about Jones minor winning th
jump; and old Foxy, or whatever the headmaster's name
was like hearing small boys at a private school, hearing
young men talk politics. 'I'm right . . . you're wrong.' A
age, he thought, he had been in the trenches; he had see
killed. But was that a good education? He shifted from on
to another. At their age, he thought, he had been alone
farm sixty miles from a white man, in control of a h
sheep. But was that a good education? Anyhow it seem
him, half hearing their argument, looking at their ge
catching their slang, that they were all the same sort.
school and university, he sized them up as he looked ov
shoulder. But where are the Sweeps and the Sewer-me
Seamstresses and the Stevedores? he though, making a
trades that began with the letter S. For all Delia's pride
promiscuity, he thought, glancing at the people, there
only Dons and Duchesses, and what other words begin w
he asked himself, as he scrutinized the placard again –
and Drones?

He turned. A nice fresh-faced boy with a freckled n
ordinary day clothes was looking at him. If he didn't tak
he would be drawn in too. Nothing would be easier than t
a society, to sign what Patrick called 'a manifesto'. But
not believe in joining societies, in signing manifesto
turned back to the desirable residence with its three-quart
an acre of garden and running water in all the bedrooms.
met, he thought, pretending to read, in hired halls. And
them stood on a platform. There was the pump-handle ge
the wringing-wet-clothes gesture; and then the voice, odd
tached from the little figure and tremendously magnified
loudspeaker, went booming and bawling round the hall: Ju
Liberty! For a moment, of course, sitting among knees, w
in tight, a ripple, a nice emotional quiver, went over the
but next morning, he said to himself as he glanced again
house-agents' placard, there's not an idea, not a phrase
would feed a sparrow. What do they mean by Justice an
erty? he asked, all these nice young men with two or
hundred a year. Something's wrong, he thought; there's a

slocation, between the word and the reality. If they want to form the world, he thought, why not begin there, at the entre, with themselves? He turned on his heel and ran straight ito an old man in a white waistcoat.

'Hullo!' he said, holding out his hand.

It was his Uncle Edward. He had the look of an insect whose ody has been eaten out, leaving only the wings, the shell.

'Very glad to see you back, North,' said Edward, and shook im warmly by the hand.

'Very glad,' he repeated. He was shy. He was spare and thin. Ie looked as if his face had been carved and graved by a multi-ude of fine instruments; as if it had been left out on a frosty ight and frozen over. He threw his head back like a horse hamping a bit; but he was an old horse, a blue-eyed horse vhose bit no longer irked him. His movements were from habit, ot from feeling. What had he been doing all these years? North vondered, as they stood there surveying each other. Editing ophocles? What would happen if Sophocles one of these days vere edited? What would they do then, these eaten out hollow-helled old men?

'You've filled out,' said Edward, looking him up and down. You've filled out,' he repeated.

There was a subtle deference in his manner. Edward, the cholar, paid tribute to North, the soldier. Yes, but they found it lifficult to talk. He had the air of being stamped, North thought; e had kept something, after all, out of the hubbub.

'Shan't we sit down?' said Edward, as if he wished to talk to im seriously about interesting things. They looked about for a uiet place. He had not frittered his time away talking to old red etters and raising his gun, North thought, glancing about him, o see if by chance there was a quiet place in the room where hey could sit down and talk. But there were only two office tools empty beside Eleanor over there in the corner.

She saw them and called out, 'Oh, there's Edward! I know here was something I wanted to ask . . .' she began.

It was a relief that the interview with the headmaster should e broken up by this impulsive, foolish old woman. She was olding out her pocket-handkerchief.

'I made a knot,' she was saying. Yes, there it was, a knot in er pocket-handkerchief.

'Now what did I make a knot for?' she said, looking up.

'It is an admirable habit to make a knot,' said Edward i courteous, clipped way, lowering himself a little stiffly on t chair beside her. 'But at the same time it is advisable. . . stopped. That's what I like about him, North thought, takin other chair: he left half his sentence unfinished.

'It was to remind me—' said Eleanor putting her hand t thick crop of white hair. Then she stopped. What is it makes him look so calm, so carved, North thought, steal look at Edward, who waited with admirable serenity fo sister to remember why she had made a knot in her han chief. There was something final about him; he left hal sentences unfinished. He hadn't worried himself about po and money, he thought. There was something sealed up, st about him. Poetry and the past, was it? But as he fixed his upon him, Edward smiled at his sister.

'Well, Nell?' he said.

It was a quiet smile, a tolerant smile.

North broke in, for Eleanor was still ruminating over knot. 'I met a man at the Cape who was a tremendous adr of yours, Uncle Edward,' he said. The name came back to h 'Arbuthnot,' he said.

'R.K.?' said Edward. And he raised his hand to his head smiled. It pleased him, that compliment. He was vain; he touchy; he was – North stole a glance to add another impres – established. Glazed over with the smooth glossy varnish those in authority wear. For he was now – what? North c not remember. A professor? A master? Somebody who ha attitude fixed on him, from which he could not relax longer. Still, Arbuthnot, R.K., had said, with emotion, tha owed more to Edward than to any man.

'He said he owed more to you than to any man,' he aloud.

Edward brushed aside the compliment; but it pleased him had a way of putting his hand to his head that North rem bered. And Eleanor called him 'Nigs'. She laughed at him; preferred failures, like Morris. There she sat holding her poc handkerchief in her hand, smiling, ironically, covertly, at s memory.

'And what are your plans?' said Edward. 'You deserve a day.'

There was something flattering in his manner, North thought, like a schoolmaster welcoming back to school an old boy who had won distinction. But he meant it; he doesn't say what he doesn't mean, North thought, and that was alarming too. They were silent.

'Delia's got a wonderful lot of people here tonight, hasn't she?' said Edward, turning to Eleanor. They sat looking at the different groups. His clear blue eyes surveyed the scene amiably but sardonically. But what's he thinking, North asked himself. He's got something behind that mask, he thought. Something that's kept him clear of this muddle. The past? Poetry? he thought, looking at Edward's distinct profile. It was finer than he remembered.

'I'd like to brush up my classics,' he said suddenly. 'Not that I ever had much to brush,' he added, foolishly, afraid of the schoolmaster.

Edward did not seem to be listening. He was raising his eye-glass and letting it fall, as he looked at the queer jumble. There his head rested with the chin thrown up, on the back of his chair. The crowd, the noise, the clatter of knives and forks, made it unnecessary to talk. North stole another glance at him. The past and poetry, he said to himself, that's what I want to talk about, he thought. He wanted to say it aloud. But Edward was too formed and idiosyncratic; too black and white and linear, with his head tilted up on the back of his chair, to ask him questions easily.

Now he was talking about Africa, and North wanted to talk about the past and poetry. There it was, he thought, locked up in that fine head, the head that was like a Greek boy's head grown white; the past and poetry. Then why not prise it open? Why not share it? What's wrong with him, he thought, as he answered the usual intelligent Englishman's questions about Africa and the state of the country. Why can't he flow? Why can't he pull the string of the shower bath? Why's it all locked up, refrigerated? Because he's a priest, a mystery monger, he thought; feeling his coldness; this guardian of beautiful words.

But Edward was speaking to him.

'We must arrange a date,' he was saying, 'next autumn.' He meant it too.

'Yes,' North said aloud, 'I'd love to .... In the autumn ....' And he saw before him a house with creeper-shaded rooms,

butlers creeping, decanters, and some one handing a box of cigars.

Unknown young men coming round with trays pre different eatables upon them.

'How very kind of you!' said Eleanor, taking a glass. He self took a glass of some yellow liquid. It was some kin claret cup, he supposed. The little bubbles kept rising to the and exploding. He watched them rise and explode.

'Who's that pretty girl,' said Edward, inclining his head, ' there, standing in the corner, talking to the youth?'

He was benignant and urbane.

'Aren't they lovely?' said Eleanor. 'Just what I was thin ... Everyone looks so young. That's Maggie's daughter. ... who's that talking to Kitty?'

'That's Middleton,' said Edward. 'What, don't you remem him? You must have met him in the old days.'

They chatted, basking there at their ease. Spinners and si in the sun, North thought, taking their ease when the d work is over; Eleanor and Edward each in his own niche, his hands on the fruit, tolerant, assured.

He watched the bubbles rising in the yellow liquid. For t it's all right, he thought; they've had their day: but not for l not for his generation. For him a life modelled on the jet (he watching the bubbles rise), on the spring, of the hard lea fountain; another life; a different life. Not halls and re berating megaphones; not marching in step after leaders herds, groups, societies, caparisoned. No; to begin inwardly, let the devil take the outer form, he thought, looking up young man with a fine forehead and a weak chin. Not b shirts, green shirts, red shirts – always posing in the public that's all poppycock. Why not down barriers and simplify? a world, he thought, that was all one jelly, one mass, would rice pudding world, a white counterpane world. To keep emblems and tokens of North Pargiter – the man Maggie lau at; the Frenchman holding his hat; but at the same time spr out, make a new ripple in human consciousness, be the bu and the stream, the stream and the bubble – myself and world together – he raised his glass. Anonymously, he said, lo ing at the clear yellow liquid. But what do I mean, he wonde – I, to whom ceremonies are suspect, and religion's dead;

don't fit, as the man said, don't fit in anywhere? He paused. There was the glass in his hand; in his mind a sentence. And he wanted to make other sentences. But how can I, he thought – he looked at Eleanor, who sat with a silk handkerchief in her hands – unless I know what's solid, what's true; in my life, in other people's lives?

'Runcorn's boy,' Eleanor suddenly ejaculated. 'The son of the porter at my flat,' she explained. She had untied the knot in her handkerchief.

'The son of the porter at your flat,' Edward repeated. His eyes were like a field on which the sun rests in winter, North thought, looking up – the winter's sun, that has no heat left in it but some pale beauty.

'Commissionaire they call him, I think,' she said.

'How I hate that word!' said Edward with a little shudder. 'Porter's good English, isn't it?'

'That's what I say,' said Eleanor. 'The son of the *porter* at my flat. . . . Well, he wants, they want him to go to college. So I said if I saw you, I'd ask you—'

'Of course, of course,' said Edward kindly.

And that's all right, North said to himself. That's the human voice at its natural speaking level. Of course, of course, he repeated.

'He wants to go to college, does he?' Edward went on. 'What examinations has he passed, eh?'

What examinations has he passed, eh? North repeated. He repeated that too, but critically, as if he were actor and critic; he listened but he commented. He surveyed the thin yellow liquid in which the bubbles rose more slowly, one by one. Eleanor did not know what examinations he had passed. And what was I thinking? North asked himself. He felt that he had been in the middle of a jungle; in the heart of darkness; cutting his way towards the light; but provided only with broken sentences, single words, with which to break through the briar-bush of human bodies, human wills and voices, that bent over him, binding him, blinding him. . . . He listened.

'Well then, tell him to come and see me,' said Edward, briskly.

'But that's asking too much of you, Edward?' Eleanor protested.

'That's what I'm for,' said Edward.

That's the right tone of voice too, North thought. Not paced – the words 'caparison' and 'carapace' collided in his r and made a new word that was no word. What I mean added, taking a drink of his claret cup, underneath there' fountain; the sweet nut. The fruit, the fountain that's in all c in Edward; in Eleanor; so why caparison ourselves on top looked up.

A big man had stopped in front of them. He bent over very politely gave Eleanor his hand. He had to bend, fo white waistcoat enclosed so magnificent a sphere. 'Alas,' he saying in a voice that was oddly mellifluous for one of his 'I'd love nothing more; but I have a meeting at ten tomo morning.' They were inviting him to sit down and talk. He tittupping up and down on his little feet in front of them.

'Throw it over!' said Eleanor, smiling up at him, just a used to smile when she was a girl with her brother's fri thought North. Then why hadn't she married one of then wondered. Why do we hide all the things that matter? he a himself.

'And leave my directors cooling their heels? As much a place is worth!' the old friend was saying, and swung roun his heel with the agility of a trained elephant.

'Seems a long time since he acted in the Greek play, do it?' said Edward. '... in a toga,' he added with a grin, follo the well-rounded person of the great railway magnate a went with a certain celerity, for he was a perfect man o world, through the crowd to the door.

'That's Chipperfield, the great railway man,' he explain North. 'A very remarkable fellow,' he went on. 'Son of a way porter.' He made little pauses between each sente 'Done it all off his own bat. . . . A delightful house. . . . Perf restored. . . . Two or three hundred acres, I suppose. . . . Ha shooting. . . . Asks me to direct his reading. . . . And buys masters.'

'And buys old masters,' North repeated. The deft little tences seemed to build up a pagoda; sparely but accurately; through it all ran some queer breath of mockery tinged affection.

'Shams, I should think,' Eleanor laughed.

'Well, we needn't go into that,' Edward chuckled. Then

vere silent. The pagoda floated off. Chipperfield had vanished hrough the door.

'How nice this drink is,' Eleanor said above his head. North could see her glass held at the level of his head on her knee. A hin green leaf floated on top of it. 'I hope it's not intoxicating?' he said, raising it.

North took up his glass again. What was I thinking last time I ooked at it? he asked himself. A block had formed in his forehead as if two thoughts had collided and had stopped the passage of the rest. His mind was a blank. He swayed the liquid from side to side. He was in the middle of a dark forest.

'So, North . . .' His own name roused him with a start. It was Edward speaking. He jerked forward. '. . . you want to brush up your classics, do you?' Edward went on. 'I'm glad to hear you say that. There's a lot in those old fellows. But the younger generation,' he paused, '. . . don't seem to want 'em.'

'How foolish!' said Eleanor. 'I was reading one of them the other day . . . the one you translated. Now which was it?' She paused. She never could remember names. 'The one about the girl who . . .'

'The Antigone?' Edward suggested.

'Yes! The Antigone!' she exclaimed. 'And I thought to myself, just what you say, Edward – how true – how beautiful. . . .'

She broke off, as if afraid to continue.

Edward nodded. He paused. Then suddenly he jerked his head back and said some words in Greek: *'οὔτοι συνέχθειν, ἀλλὰ συμφιλεῖν ἔφυν.'*

North looked up.

'Translate it,' he said.

Edward shook his head. 'It's the language,' he said.

Then he shut up. It's no go, North thought. He can't say what he wants to say; he's afraid. They're all afraid; afraid of being laughed at; afraid of giving themselves away. He's afraid too, he thought, looking at the young man with a fine forehead and a weak chin who was gesticulating too emphatically. We're all afraid of each other, he thought; afraid of what? Of criticism; of laughter; of people who think differently. . . . He's afraid of me because I'm a farmer (and he saw again his round face; high cheek-bones and small brown eyes). And I'm afraid of him because he's clever. He looked at the big forehead, from which the

hair was already receding. That's what separates us; fea
thought.

He shifted his position. He wanted to get up and talk to
Delia had said, 'Don't wait to be introduced.' But it was dif
to speak to a man whom he did not know, and say: 'W
this knot in the middle of my forehead? Untie it.' For he hac
enough of thinking alone. Thinking alone tied knots in
middle of the forehead; thinking alone bred pictures, fo
pictures. The man was moving off. He must make the effort
he hesitated. He felt repelled and attracted, attracted an
pelled. He began to rise; but before he had got on his feet s
body thumped on a table with a fork.

A large man sitting at a table in the corner was thumpin
the table with his fork. He was leaning forward as if he wa
to attract attention, as if he were about to make a speech. It
the man Peggy called Brown; the others called Nicholas; w
real name he did not know. Perhaps he was a little drunk.

'Ladies and gentlemen!' he said. 'Ladies and gentlemen!
repeated rather more loudly.

'What, a speech?' said Edward quizzically. He half turnec
chair; he raised his eyeglass, which hung on a black silk rib
as if it were a foreign order.

People were buzzing about with plates and glasses. They w
stumbling over cushions on the floor. A girl pitched head f
most.

'Hurt yourself?' said a young man, stretching out his hand

No, she had not hurt herself. But the interruption had
tracted attention from the speech. A buzz of talk had risen
the buzz of flies over sugar. Nicholas sat down again. He
lost apparently in contemplation of the red stone in his ring
of the strewn flowers; the white, waxy flowers, the pale, s
transparent flowers, the crimson flowers that were so full-blo
that the gold heart showed, and the petals had fallen and
among the hired knives and forks, the cheap tumblers on
table. Then he roused himself.

'Ladies and gentlemen!' he began. Again he thumped the ta
with his fork. There was a momentary lull. Rose marched ac
the room.

'Going to make a speech, are you?' she demanded. 'Go o
like hearing speeches.' She stood beside him, with her hand

owed round her ear like a military man. Again the buzz of talk had broken out.

'Silence!' she exclaimed. She took a knife and rapped on the table.

'Silence! Silence!' She rapped again.

Martin crossed the room.

'What's Rose making such a noise about?' he asked.

'I'm asking for silence!' she said, flourishing her knife in his face. 'This gentleman wants to make a speech!'

But he had sat down and was regarding his ring with equanimity.

'Isn't she the very spit and image,' said Martin, laying his hand on Rose's shoulder and turning to Eleanor as if to confirm his words, 'of old Uncle Pargiter of Pargiter's Horse?'

'Well, I'm proud of it! said Rose, brandishing her knife in his face. 'I'm proud of my family; proud of my country; proud of . . .'

'Your sex?' he interrupted her.

'I am,' she asseverated. 'And what about you?' she went on, tapping him on the shoulder. 'Proud of yourself, are you?'

'Don't quarrel, children, don't quarrel!' cried Eleanor, giving her chair a little edge nearer. 'They always would quarrel,' she said, 'always . . . always. . . .'

'She was a horrid little spitfire,' said Martin, squatting down on the floor, and looking up at Rose, 'with her hair scraped off her forehead . . .'

'. . . wearing a pink frock,' Rose added. She sat down abruptly, holding her knife erect in her hand. 'A pink frock; a pink frock,' she repeated, as if the words recalled something.

'But go on with your speech, Nicholas,' said Eleanor, turning to him. He shook his head.

'Let us talk about pink frocks,' he smiled.

'. . . in the drawing-room at Abercorn Terrace, when we were children,' said Rose. 'D'you remember?' She looked at Martin. He nodded his head.

'In the drawing-room at Abercorn Terrace . . .' said Delia. She was going from table to table with a great jug of claret cup. She stopped in front of them. 'Abercorn Terrace!' she exclaimed, filling a glass. She flung her head back and looked for a moment astonishingly young, handsome, and defiant.

'It was Hell!' she exclaimed. 'It was Hell!' she repeated.

'Oh come, Delia . . .' Martin protested, holding out his gl be filled.

'It was Hell,' she said, dropping her Irish manner, and s ing quite simply, as she poured out the drink.

'D'you know,' she said, looking at Eleanor, 'when I go tc dington, I always say to the man, "Drive the other round!" '

'That's enough . . .' Martin stopped her; his glass was f hated it too . . .' he began.

But here Kitty Lasswade advanced upon them. She hel glass in front of her as though it were a bauble.

'What's Martin hating now?' she said, facing him.

A polite gentleman pushed forward a little gilt chair which she sat down.

'He always was a hater,' she said, holding her glass out filled.

'What was it you hated that night, Martin, when you with us?' she asked him. 'I remember how angry you me. . . .'

She smiled at him. He had grown cherubic; pink and pl with his hair brushed back like a waiter's.

'Hated? I never hated anybody,' he protested.

'My heart's full of love; my heart's full of kindness laughed, waving his glass at her.

'Nonsense,' said Kitty. 'When you were young you hate everything!' she flung her hand out. 'My house . . . my fri . . .' She broke off with a quick little sigh. She saw them ag the men filing in; the women pinching some dress between thumbs and fingers. She lived alone now, in the north.

'. . . and I daresay I'm better off as I am,' she added, ha herself, 'with just a boy to chop up wood.'

There was a pause.

'Now let him get on with his speech,' said Eleanor.

'Yes. Get on with your speech!' said Rose. Again she ra her knife on the table; again he half rose.

'Going to make a speech, is he?' said Kitty, turning to Ed who had drawn his chair up beside her.

'The only place where oratory is now practised as an ar Edward began. Then he paused, drew his chair a little c and adjusted his glasses, '. . . is the church,' he added.

That's why I didn't marry you, Kitty said to herself. Hov

voice, the supercilious voice, brought it back! the tree half fallen; rain falling; undergraduates calling; bells tolling; she and her mother. . . .

But Nicholas had risen. He took a deep breath which expanded his shirt front. With one hand he fumbled with his fob; the other he flung out with an oratorical gesture.

'Ladies and gentlemen!' he began again. 'In the name of all who have enjoyed themselves tonight. . . .'

'Speak up! Speak up!' the young men cried who were standing in the window.

('Is he a foreigner?' Kitty whispered to Eleanor.)

'. . . in the name of all who have enjoyed themselves tonight,' he repeated more loudly, 'I wish to thank our host and hostess. . . .'

'Oh, don't thank me!' said Delia brushing past them with her empty jug.

Again the speech was brought to the ground. He must be a foreigner, Kitty thought to herself, because he has no self-consciousness. There he stood holding his wine-glass and smiling.

'Go on, go on,' she urged him. 'Don't mind them.' She was in the mood for a speech. A speech was a good thing at parties. It gave them a fillip. It gave them a finish. She rapped her glass on the table.

'It's very nice of you,' said Delia, trying to push past him, but he had laid his hand on her arm, 'but don't thank me.'

'But Delia,' he expostulated, still holding her, 'it's not what *you* want; it's what *we* want. And it is fitting,' he continued, waving his hand out, 'when our hearts are full of gratitude . . .'

Now he's getting into his stride, Kitty thought. I daresay he's a bit of an orator. Most foreigners are.

'. . . when our hearts are full of gratitude,' he repeated, touching one finger.

'What for?' said a voice abruptly.

Nicholas stopped again.

('Who is that dark man?' Kitty whispered to Eleanor. 'I've been wondering all the evening.'

'Renny,' Eleanor whispered. 'Renny,' she repeated.)

'What for?' said Nicholas. 'That is what I am about to tell you. . . .' He paused, and drew a deep breath which again expanded his waistcoat. His eyes beamed; he seemed full of spontaneous subterraneous benevolence. But here a head

popped up over the edge of the table; a hand swept up a fi of flower petals; and a voice cried:

'Red Rose, thorny Rose, brave Rose, tawny Rose!' The pe were thrown, fan-shape, over the stout old woman who sitting on the edge of her chair. She looked up in surprise. Pe had fallen on her. She brushed them where they had lo upon the prominences of her person. 'Thank you! Thank y she exclaimed. Then she took up a flower and beat it ergetically upon the edge of the table. 'But I want my spee she said, looking at Nicholas.

'No, no,' he said. 'This is not a time for making speeches,' sat down again.

'Let's drink then,' said Martin. He raised his glass. 'Pargite Pargiter's Horse!' he said. 'I drink to her!' He put his glass d with a thump on the table.

'Oh, if you're all drinking healths,' said Kitty, 'I'll drink Rose, your health. Rose is a fine fellow,' she said, raising glass. 'But Rose was wrong,' she added. 'Force is always wr – don't you agree with me, Edward?' She tapped him on knee. I'd forgotten the War, she muttered half to herself. 'S she said aloud, 'Rose had the courage of her convictions. I went to prison. And I drink to her!' She drank.

'The same to you, Kitty,' said Rose, bowing to her.

'She smashed his window,' Martin jeered at her, 'and then helped him to smash other people's windows. Where's your oration, Rose?'

'In a cardboard box on the mantelpiece,' said Rose. 'You c get a rise out of me at this time of day, my good fellow.'

'But I wish you had let Nicholas finish his speech,' Eleanor.

Down through the ceiling, muted and far away, came preliminary notes of another dance. The young people, has swallowing what remained in their glasses, rose and begar move off upstairs. Soon there was the sound of feet thudd rhythmically, heavily on the floor above.

'Another dance?' said Eleanor. It was a waltz. 'When we v young,' she said, looking at Kitty, 'we used to dance. . . .' tune seemed to take her words and to repeat them – when I young I used to dance – I used to dance. . . .

'And how I hated it!' said Kitty, looking at her fingers, wh

were short and pricked. 'How nice it is,' she said, 'not to be young! How nice not to mind what people think! Now one can live as one likes,' she added, '. . . now that one's seventy.'

She paused. She raised her eyebrows as if she remembered something. 'Pity one can't live again,' she said. But she broke off.

'Aren't we going to have our speech after all, Mr—?' she said, looking at Nicholas, whose name she did not know. He sat gazing benevolently in front of him, paddling his hands among the flower petals.

'What's the good?' he said. 'Nobody wants to listen.' They listened to the feet thudding upstairs, and to the music repeating, it seemed to Eleanor, when I was young I used to dance, all men loved me when I was young. . . .

'But I want a speech!' said Kitty in her authoritative manner. It was true; she wanted something – something that gave a fillip, a finish – what she scarcely knew. But not the past – not memories. The present; the future; that was what she wanted.

'There's Peggy!' said Eleanor, looking round. She was sitting on the edge of a table, eating a ham sandwich.

'Come, Peggy!' she called out. 'Come and talk to us!'

'Speak for the younger generation, Peggy!' said Lady Lasswade, shaking hands.

'But I'm not the younger generation,' said Peggy. 'And I've made my speech already,' she said. 'I made a fool of myself upstairs,' she said, sinking down on the floor at Eleanor's feet.

'Then, North . . .' said Eleanor, looking down on the parting of North's hair as he sat on the floor beside her.

'Yes, North,' said Peggy, looking at him across her aunt's knee. 'North says we talk of nothing but money and politics,' she added. 'Tell us what we ought to do.' He started. He had been dozing off, dazed by the music and voices. What we ought to do? he said to himself, waking up. What ought we to do?

He jerked up into a sitting posture. He saw Peggy's face looking at him. Now she was smiling; her face was gay; it reminded him of his grandmother's face in the picture. But he saw it as he had seen it upstairs – scarlet, puckered – as if she were about to burst into tears. It was her face that was true; not her words. But only her words returned to him – to live differently – differently. He paused. This is what needs courage, he said to himself; to speak the truth. She was listening. The old people were already gossiping about their own affairs.

'... It's a nice little house,' Kitty was saying. 'An old n
woman used to live there.... You'll have to come and stay w
me, Nell. In the spring....'

Peggy was watching him over the rim of her ham sandwich

'What you said was true,' he blurted out, '... quite true.
was what she meant that was true, he corrected himself;
feeling, not her words. He felt her feeling now; it was not ab
him; it was about other people; about another world, a n
world....

The old aunts and uncles were gossiping above him.

'What was the name of the man I used to like so much
Oxford?' Lady Lasswade was saying. He could see her sil
body bending towards Edward.

'The man you liked at Oxford?' Edward was repeating.
thought you never liked anyone at Oxford....' And th
laughed.

But Peggy was waiting, she was watching him. He saw ag
the glass with the bubbles rising; he felt again the constricti
of a knot in his forehead. He wished there were someo
infinitely wise and good, to think for him, to answer for hi
But the young man with the receding forehead had vanished.

'... To live differently ... differently,' he repeated. Th
were her words; they did not altogether fit his meaning; but
had to use them. Now I've made a fool of myself too,
thought, as a ripple of some disagreeable sensation went acr
his back as if a knife had sliced it, and he leant against the wal

'Yes, it was Robson!' Lady Lasswade exclaimed. Her trump
voice rang out over his head.

'How one forgets things!' she went on. 'Of course – Robso
That was his name. And the girl I used to like – Nelly? The g
who was going to be a doctor?'

'Died, I think,' said Edward.

'Died, did she – died—' said Lady Lasswade. She paused for
moment. 'Well, I wish you'd made your speech,' she said, tur
ing and looking down at North.

He drew himself back. No more speech-making for me,
thought. He had his glass in his hand still. It was still half full
pale yellow liquid. The bubbles had ceased to rise. The wine w
clear and still. Stillness and solitude, he thought to himse
silence and solitude ... that's the only element in which t
mind is free now.

Silence and solitude, he repeated; silence and solitude. His eyes half closed themselves. He was tired; he was dazed; people talked; people talked. He would detach himself, generalize himself, imagine that he was lying in a great space on a blue plain with hills on the rim of the horizon. He stretched out his feet. There were the sheep cropping; slowly tearing the grass; advancing first one stiff leg and then another. And babbling – babbling. He made no sense of what they were saying. Through his half-open eyes he saw hands holding flowers – thin hands, fine hands; but hands that belonged to no one. And were they flowers the hands held? Or mountains? Blue mountains with violet shadows? Then petals fell. Pink, yellow, white with violet shadows, the petals fell. They fall and fall and cover all, he murmured. And there was the stem of a wine glass; the rim of a plate; and a bowl of water. The hands went on picking up flower after flower; that was a white rose; that was a yellow rose; that was a rose with violet valleys in its petals. There they hung, many folded, many coloured, drooping over the rim of the bowl. And petals fell. There they lay, violet and yellow, little shallops, boats on a river. And he was floating, and drifting, in a shallop, in a petal, down a river into silence, into solitude ... which is the worst torture, the words came back to him as if a voice had spoken them, that human beings can inflict. ...

'Wake up, North ... we want your speech!' a voice interrupted him. Kitty's red handsome face was hanging over him.

'Maggie!' he exclaimed, pulling himself up. It was she who was sitting there, putting flowers into water. 'Yes, it's Maggie's turn to speak,' said Nicholas, putting his hand on her knee.

'Speak, speak!' Renny urged her.

But she shook her head. Laughter took her and shook her. She laughed, throwing her head back as if she were possessed by some genial spirit outside herself that made her bend and rise, as a tree, North thought, is tossed and bent by the wind. No idols, no idols, no idols, her laughter seemed to chime as if the tree were hung with innumerable bells, and he laughed too.

Their laughter ceased. Feet thudded, dancing on the floor above. A siren hooted on the river. A van crashed down the street in the distance. There was a rush and quiver of sound; something seemed to be released; it was as if the life of the day

were about to begin, and this were the chorus, the cry, chirp, the stir, which salutes the London dawn.

Kitty turned to Nicholas.

'And what was your speech going to have been about, Mr I'm afraid I don't know your name?' she said.

'. . . the one that was interrupted?'

'My speech?' he laughed. 'It was to have been a miracle!' said. 'A masterpiece! But how can one speak when one is alw interrupted? I begin: I say, Let us give thanks. Then Delia sa Don't thank me. I begin again: I say, Let us give thanks to so one, to somebody . . . And Renny says, What for? I begin aga and look – Eleanor is sound asleep.' (He pointed at her.) what's the good?'

'Oh, but there is some good—' Kitty began.

She still wanted something – some finish, some fillip – w she did not know. And it was getting late. She must go.

'Tell me, privately, what you were going to have said, Mr- she asked him.

'What I was going to have said? I was going to have said—' paused and stretched his hand out; he touched each finger s arately.

'First I was going to have thanked our host and hostess. Th I was going to have thanked this house—' he waved his ha round the room hung with the placards of the house age '—which has sheltered the lovers, the creators, the men a women of goodwill. And finally—' he took his glass in his ha 'I was going to drink to the human race. The human race,' continued, raising his glass to his lips, 'which is now in its fancy, may it grow to maturity! Ladies and gentlemen!' he claimed, half rising and expanding his waistcoat, 'I drink that!'

He brought his glass down with a thump on the table. broke.

'That's the thirteenth glass broken tonight!' said Del coming up and stopping in front of them. 'But don't minc don't mind. They're very cheap – glasses.'

'What's very cheap?' Eleanor murmured. She half opened h eyes. But where was she? In what room? In which of the numerable rooms? Always there were rooms; always there we people. Always from the beginning of time. . . . She shut h

hands on the coins she was holding, and again she was suffused with a feeling of happiness. Was it because this had survived – this keen sensation (she was waking up) and the other thing, the solid object – she saw an ink-corroded walrus – had vanished? She opened her eyes wide. Here she was; alive; in this room, with living people. She saw all the heads in a circle. At first they were without identity. Then she recognized them. That was Rose; that was Martin; that was Morris. He had hardly any hair on the top of his head. There was a curious pallor on his face.

There was a curious pallor on all their faces as she looked round. The brightness had gone out of the electric lights; the table-cloths looked whiter. North's head – he was sitting on the floor at her feet – was rimmed with whiteness. His shirt-front was a little crumpled.

He was sitting on the floor at Edward's feet with his hands bound round his knees, and he gave little jerks and looked up at him as if he appealed to him about something.

'Uncle Edward,' she heard him say, 'tell me this . . .'

He was like a child asking to be told a story.

'Tell me this,' he repeated, giving another little jerk. 'You're a scholar. About the classics now. Aeschylus. Sophocles. Pindar.'

Edward bent towards him.

'And the chorus,' North jerked on again. She leant towards them. 'The chorus—' North repeated.

'My dear boy,' she heard Edward say as he smiled benignly down at him, 'don't ask me. I was never a great hand at that. No, if I'd had my way' – he paused and passed his hand over his forehead – 'I should have been . . .' A burst of laughter drowned his words. She could not catch the end of the sentence. What had he said – what had he wished to be? She had lost his words.

There must be another life, she thought, sinking back into her chair, exasperated. Not in dreams; but here and now, in this room, with living people. She felt as if she were standing on the edge of a precipice with her hair blown back; she was about to grasp something that just evaded her. There must be another life, here and now, she repeated. This is too short, too broken. We know nothing, even about ourselves. We're only just beginning, she thought, to understand, here and there. She hollowed her hands in her lap, just as Rose had hollowed hers round her ears. She held her hands hollowed; she felt that she wanted to enclose the present moment; to make it stay; to fill it

fuller and fuller, with the past, the present and the future, u
it shone, whole, bright, deep with understanding.

'Edward,' she began, trying to attract his attention. But
was not listening to her; he was telling North some old coll
story. It's useless, she thought, opening her hands. It must d
It must fall. And then? she thought. For her too there would
the endless night; the endless dark. She looked ahead of her
though she saw opening in front of her a very long dark tunn
But, thinking of the dark, something baffled her; in fact it
growing light. The blinds were white.

There was a stir in the room.

Edward turned to her.

'Who are *they*?' he asked her, pointing to the door.

She looked. Two children stood in the door. Delia had
hands on their shoulders as if to encourage them. She was le
ing them over to the table in order to give them something
eat. They looked awkward and clumsy.

Eleanor glanced at their hands, at their clothes, at the sha
of their ears. 'The children of the caretaker, I should think,'
said. Yes, Delia was cutting slices of cake for them, and th
were larger slices of cake than she would have cut had th
been the children of her own friends. The children took
slices and stared at them with a curious fixed stare as if th
were fierce. But perhaps they were frightened, because she h
brought them up from the basement into the drawing-room.

'Eat it!' said Delia, giving them a little pat.

They began to munch slowly, gazing solemnly round them

'Hullo, children!' cried Martin, beckoning to them. Th
stared at him solemnly.

'Haven't you got a name?' he said. They went on eating
silence. He began to fumble in his pocket.

'Speak!' he said. 'Speak!'

'The younger generation,' said Peggy, 'don't mean to speak.'

They turned their eyes on her now; but they went on munc
ing. 'No school tomorrow?' she said. They shook their hea
from side to side.

'Hurrah!' said Martin. He held the coins in his hand; press
between his thumb and finger. 'Now – sing a song for sixpenc
he said.

'Yes. Weren't you taught something at school?' Peggy aske

They stared at her but remained silent. They had stopped eating. They were a centre of a little group. They swept their eyes over the grown-up people for a moment, then, each giving the other a little nudge, they burst into song:

Etho passo tanno hai,
Fai donk to tu do,
Mai to, kai to, lai to see
Toh dom to tuh do—

That was what it sounded like. Not a word was recognizable. The distorted sounds rose and sank as if they followed a tune. They stopped.

They stood with their hands behind their backs. Then with one impulse they attacked the next verse:

Fanno to par, etto to mar,
Timin tudo, tido,
Foll to gar in, mitno to par,
Eido, teido, meido—

They sang the second verse more fiercely than the first. The rhythm seemed to rock and the unintelligible words ran themselves together almost into a shriek. The grown-up people did not know whether to laugh or to cry. Their voices were so harsh; the accent was so hideous.

They burst out again:

Chree to gay ei,
Geeray didax. . . .

Then they stopped. It seemed to be in the middle of a verse. They stood there grinning, silent, looking at the floor. Nobody knew what to say. There was something horrible in the noise they made. It was so shrill, so discordant, and so meaningless. Then old Patrick ambled up.

'Ah, that's very nice, that's very nice. Thank you, my dears,' he said in his genial way, fiddling with his toothpick. The children grinned at him. Then they began to make off. As they sidled past Martin, he slipped coins into their hands. Then they made a dash for the door.

'But what the devil were they singing?' said Hugh Gib couldn't understand a word of it, I must confess.' He hel hands to the sides of his large white waistcoat.

'Cockney accent, I suppose,' said Patrick. 'What they t 'em at school, you know.'

'But it was . . .' Eleanor began. She stopped. What was it they stood there they had looked so dignified; yet they made this hideous noise. The contrast between their faces their voices was astonishing; it was impossible to find one w for the whole. 'Beautiful?' she said, with a note of interrogat turning to Maggie.

'Extraordinarily,' said Maggie.

But Eleanor was not sure that they were thinking of the s thing.

She gathered together her gloves, her bag and two or t coppers, and got up. The room was full of a queer pale li Objects seemed to be rising out of their sleep, out of their guise, and to be assuming the sobriety of daily life. The ro was making ready for its use as an estate agent's office. tables were becoming office tables; their legs were the leg office tables, and yet they were still strewn with plates glasses, with roses, lilies and carnations.

'It's time to go,' she said, crossing the room. Delia had gon the window. Now she jerked the curtains open.

'The dawn!' she exclaimed rather melodramatically.

The shapes of houses appeared across the square. Their bli were all drawn; they seemed fast asleep still in the morn pallor.

'The dawn!' said Nicholas, getting up and stretching hims He too walked across to the window. Renny followed him.

'Now for the peroration,' he said, standing with him in window. 'The dawn – the new day—'

He pointed at the trees, at the roofs, at the sky.

'No,' said Nicholas, holding back the curtain. 'There you mistaken. There is going to be no peroration – no peroration! exclaimed, throwing his arm out, 'because there was no spee

'But the dawn has risen,' said Renny, pointing at the sky.

It was a fact. The sun had risen. The sky between the ch neys looked extraordinarily blue.

'And I am going to bed,' said Nicholas after a pause. He turned way.

'Where is Sara?' he said, looking round him. There she was urled up in a corner with her head against a table asleep apparntly.

'Wake your sister, Magdalena,' he said, turning to Maggie. Iaggie looked at her. Then she took a flower from the table and ossed it at her. She half-opened her eyes. 'It's time,' said Maggie, ouching her on the shoulder. 'Time, is it?' she sighed. She awned and stretched herself. She fixed her eyes on Nicholas as she were bringing him back to the field of vision. Then she ughed.

'Nicholas!' she exclaimed.

'Sara!' he replied. They smiled at each other. Then he helped er up and she balanced herself uncertainly against her sister, nd rubbed her eyes.

'How strange,' she murmured, looking round her, '... how trange. ...'

There were the smeared plates, and the empty wine-glasses; he petals and the bread crumbs. In the mixture of lights they ooked prosaic but unreal; cadaverous but brilliant. And there gainst the window, gathered in a group, were the old brothers nd sisters.

'Look, Maggie,' she whispered, turning to her sister, 'Look!' he pointed at the Pargiters, standing in the window.

The group in the window, the men in their black-and-white vening dress, the women in their crimsons, golds and silvers, vore a statuesque air for a moment, as if they were carved in tone. Their dresses fell in stiff sculptured folds. Then they noved; they changed their attitudes; they began to talk.

'Can't I give you a lift back, Nell?' Kitty Lasswade was saying. I've a car waiting.'

Eleanor did not answer. She was looking at the curtained ouses across the square. The windows were spotted with gold. verything looked clean swept, fresh and virginal. The pigeons vere shuffling on the tree tops.

'I've a car ...' Kitty repeated.

'Listen ...' said Eleanor, raising her hand. Upstairs they were laying 'God save the King' on the gramophone; but it was the igeons she meant; they were crooning.

'That's wood pigeons, isn't it?' said Kitty. She put her he one side to listen. Take two coos, Taffy, take two coos . . . t they were crooning.

'Wood-pigeons?' said Edward, putting his hand to his ear

'There on the tree tops,' said Kitty. The green-blue birds shuffling about on the branches, pecking and crooning to selves.

Morris brushed the crumbs off his waistcoat.

'What an hour for us old fogies to be out of bed!' he sa haven't seen the sun rise since . . . since. . . .'

'Ah, but when we were young,' said old Patrick, slapping on the shoulder, 'we thought nothing of making a night o remember going to Covent Garden and buying roses for a tain lady . . .'

Delia smiled as if some romance, her own or another's, been recalled to her.

'And I . . .' Eleanor began. She stopped. She saw an e milk jug and leaves falling. Then it had been autumn. N was summer. The sky was a faint blue; the roofs were t purple against the blue; the chimneys were a pure brick re air of ethereal calm and simplicity lay over everything.

'And all the tubes have stopped, and all the omnibuses, said turning round. 'How are we going to get home?'

'We can walk,' said Rose. 'Walking won't do us any harn

'Not on a fine summer morning,' said Martin.

A breeze went through the square. In the stillness they hear the branches rustle as they rose slightly, and fell, shook a wave of green light through the air.

Then the door burst open. Couple after couple came floc in, dishevelled, gay, to look for their cloaks and their hats, t good-night.

'It's been so good of you to come!' Delia exclaimed, tur towards them with her hands outstretched.

'Thank you – thank you for coming!' she cried.

'And look at Maggie's bunch!' she said, taking a bunc many coloured flowers that Maggie held out to her.

'How beautifully you've arranged them!' she said. 'L Eleanor!' She turned to her sister.

But Eleanor was standing with her back to them. She watching a taxi that was gliding slowly round the squar stopped in front of a house two doors down.

'Aren't they lovely?' said Delia, holding out the flowers.

Eleanor started.

'The roses? Yes . . .' she said. But she was watching the cab. A oung man had got out; he paid the driver. Then a girl in a weed travelling suit followed him. He fitted his latch-key to the oor. 'There,' Eleanor murmured, as he opened the door and hey stood for a moment on the threshold. 'There!' she repeated, s the door shut with a little thud behind them.

Then she turned round into the room. 'And now?' she said, ooking at Morris, who was drinking the last drops of a glass of vine. 'And now?' she asked, holding out her hands to him.

The sun had risen, and the sky above the houses wore an air f extraordinary beauty, simplicity and peace.

THER TITLES BY VIRGINIA WOOLF IN TRIAD/PANTHER
APERBACKS

HE WAVES

ix major characters describe the passage of life from childhood
o middle age, and through them Virginia Woolf explores with
emarkable insight the impressions, feelings and observations
vhich constantly flood the mind of every thinking person.

Virginia Woolf's greatest achievement'
tephen Spender

0p

RLANDO

orn a boy, Orlando wakes up one day to discover that he
s now a she. Eternally bright, beautiful and curious, Orlando
njoys one century after another. History is turned on its
enerable head in this witty, enchanting fantasy written
or Vita Sackville-West.

5p



R
he
s
op
A RC
Based
in Oc
fines
who
abse
mot
and
can
60p
ur